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**Linguagem, Poder e Género nas Peças de David  
Mamet**

**Language, Power and Gender in the Plays of David  
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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Ingleses, realizada sob a orientação científica do Dr. Anthony David Barker, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

## **Agradecimientos**

For my supervisor, Professor Dr. Anthony Barker, who has been there for me at all times and has always given me all the guidance, encouragement and support a student should need.

For my deceased father, who was a model of hard-work and perseverance.

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## **O júri**

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## Palavras-chave

drama, minimalismo, capitalismo, o mundo da classe trabalhadora, linguagem demótica, masculinidade, negócios, burlões, competição feroz, individualismo, demonstração de superioridade, poder, ganância, depravação, degradação, invectiva, profanidade, moralidade, isolamento, hipocrisia, o mito do sonho americano.

## Resumo

Esta tese visa a análise e conclusão sobre uso da linguagem, das relações de poder e da inter-relação entre pessoas do mesmo ou de diferente sexo nas peças mais relevantes da fase intermédia da carreira do dramaturgo David Mamet.

Para dar cumprimento a esta tarefa, iniciarei com uma contextualização histórica do autor e do teatro na América do Norte dos anos setenta aos anos noventa. Seguidamente, procederei à análise do estilo linguístico de Mamet. Aqui incidirei sobre o estilo do autor relativamente à construção das cenas, do diálogo, e das suas especificidades linguísticas, tal como a gramática, a sintaxe, o ritmo, a velocidade (o andamento), a prosódia, o recurso à invectiva, à profanidade, ao calão e à linguagem demótica, para concluir sobre a sua função.

De seguida, debruçar-me-ei sobre o modo como as relações de poder são estabelecidas nas peças em apreço. Numa primeira instância, apresentarei os resultados de uma pesquisa sobre os elementos passíveis de constituírem fontes de poder, depois analisarei a forma como as personagens masculinas estabelecem relações de poder com os seus pares e com as personagens do sexo oposto, para de seguida me debruçar sobre o como e o porquê da transformação de carácter e linguística que se opera em duas das personagens principais destas peças.

Finalmente, procederei à caracterização da linguagem da masculinidade nas peças, das figuras masculinas e femininas, bem como da natureza da polarização das figuras masculinas e das figuras masculinas *versus* femininas.

**Keywords**

drama, minimalism, capitalism, blue-collar world, demotic language, masculinity, business, con tricksters, fierce competition, individualism, one-upmanship, power, greed, depravity, degradation, invective, profanity, morality, isolation, hypocrisy, myth of the American Dream.

**Abstract**

This thesis aims to analyse Mamet's mid-career as a playwright and his object of drama through the study of five of his most acclaimed plays of the time. To accomplish my task I am going to provide a historical contextualization of the author and of theatre in the 1970s up until the early 1990s America. Then, I am going to carry out a thorough analysis of Mamet's linguistic style. Here, I will study Mamet's approach to dialogue and scene setting/building, and his linguistic specificities such as the use of invective, profanity, grammar, syntax, rhythm, pace, prosody, jargon and demotic language, to conclude about their effects. After that, I am going to analyse how power relations are established in the plays. First, I am going to present the results of my research on what can constitute symbols of power; second, I am going to analyse how men establish power relations with one another and with women; and third, I am going to account for how and why two major characters in these plays undergo a linguistic and character transformation. Finally, I am going to characterize the language of masculinity in the plays, the male and female figures and the nature of male-male and male-female polarization.

# Language, Power and Gender in the Plays of David Mamet

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*"I was taught as an actor to devote myself to the theatre, not necessarily to the American or contemporary theatre but to the metaphysical idea of a place of recognition, of a place where people can come to see what they know and hear what they know".*

David Mamet in "David Mamet in Conversation", 2001: 20

## **Introduction**

My first contact with David Alan Mamet was through his most acclaimed plays *Oleanna* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The dramatist struck me as a playwright because of his enticing simplicity and minimal directions, down-to-earth cold pragmatism, the complexity of the characters he reconstructed on stage and, simultaneously, his capacity to generate in his dialogue-based plays ambiguous "gaps of indeterminacy" for the audience to fill in. That is to say, I was struck by his capacity to imply in his plays, through innuendo, incompleteness of information or the lack of clarification, meanings and ideas that sometimes proved not to be consensual amongst the audiences. His use of language was unique, as it reflected the idiom and sounds of American demotic speech, which (I imagined) on stage wouldn't pass unnoticed either. As a poet of the streets, the sonorities of his language, with its vitality, brutality and rawness resemble the sounds of Rap. Nobody in the theatre seemed to be so close to the blue-collar experience, or has been able to evoke that rough American reality so well. Although he is of the same tense and unclassifiable school as Pinter, his work is thoroughly American and his language more broken up. His style has made the plays easy to read, but hard to understand, for the different theatrical possibilities they offer. Mamet's work seemed to me unique in the contemporary American theatre context; as a man he raises questions worthy of exploration, and as a playwright he brought out issues equally worthy of investigation and analysis. Thus, the center of my interest in him turned out to be the role of language, power and gender relationships in the construction of his dramatic pieces.

To have the chance to analyse *Oleanna* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* more closely, I decided to centre my attention in Mamet's mid-career, from the very late

1970s to the early 1990s. It was during this period of time that most of his valuable work as a playwright was premiered and gained both domestic and international recognition. To cover this period of David Mamet's work treating the aspects most significant to me, I centered my attention on five of his most acclaimed plays of the time, namely *Lakeboat* (1980), *Edmond* (1982), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983), *Speed-The-Plow* (1988), and *Oleanna* (1992). These plays also cover divergent areas of activity and provide a varied sample of Mamet's work as a playwright of that time. *Lakeboat* and *Edmond* differ from the other three plays for many different reasons; for example, apart from being both episodic plays, *Lakeboat*'s prevalent nostalgic mood makes it distinctive, and *Edmond*, for its bleak fable-like struture, is regarded as a sort of experimental work.

To carry out my investigation, I have divided my project into five different chapters, each covering a set of important themes to consider in the accomplishment of my objective. The first and second chapters aim to present useful information that may contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of the author, influences on him and of his socio-cultural and dramaturgical context. In the first chapter, I will offer a historical contextualization of Mamet as a man, in order to explain how he began a career as a playwright. So as to place Mamet in the American theatrical context, particularly during his mid-career, I am going to show how his private, socio-economic, political and cultural experiences, particularly during the late 1960s up until the early 1990s, have influenced him and his work. In the second chapter I intend to present the result of a brief review of theatre's place in wider American culture as well as of Mamet's place in it. I also aim at presenting the common ground that different scholars have found between Mamet's work as a playwright and other playwrights whom he admits to having had some influence upon him. Next, I am going to talk about Mamet's main concerns as a dramatist, and present an analysis of how Mamet's sense of the object or purpose of drama is first hinted at in his five plays. In the third chapter I am going to investigate Mamet's linguistic style. Here I intend to find out how he builds his plays linguistically and review the dramatic effects of his use of jargon and demotic language in each of the five plays. In so doing I will deal with the effects caused by other linguistic devices and styles such as invective and

profanity, irregular grammar and syntax, and rhythm, pace and prosody, which render his speech so unique. In the fourth chapter I am going to investigate how power relations are established between characters of the same and of different genders, and the means characters lay hold of to express and exert their powerfulness. Here, I also intend to present some critical points of view concerning Mamet's habitual representation of women as weak and powerless figures. As Carol (in *Oleanna*) and Edmond (in *Edmond*) are the sole characters in the five plays that reveal any significant transformation of character and attitude throughout the play, I also plan to analyse how and why that transformation occurs. In the fifth chapter I am going to present the results of my research on women's position in the American society of the period here in focus in comparison to that of men's, both at the higher and lower levels of society, and draw some conclusions about how that has affected Mamet's representation of women in his blue-collar-world plays. I also plan to study how Mamet depicts the male and the female figures, and how they interrelate.

It is to be noted here that not all the five plays under scrutiny were originally written and staged in the period of time I intend to cover. In an interview with Mark Zweigler, Mamet explains how the first version of *Lakeboat* was concluded and first produced. He had just finished his graduation from Goddard College when he wrote a letter to some friends at Marlboro College, in Vermont, asking for a summer job as an actor. In answer, he was asked to replace the professor who ran the drama department, since he was leaving on sabbatical, and to send them anything that could be used to recommend him for that post. Mamet wrote them back saying that he had just finished a new play - which he hadn't. They invited him to go to Marlboro College and produce it. So, he quickly worked on some notes he had taken about the time he worked on a ship for the Merchant Marine and thus came up with the first version of *Lakeboat*, which was successfully staged for a small audience at a Theatre Workshop, at Marlboro College, in Vermont, in 1970. In spite of that, the play was thereafter kept in a trunk for almost ten years, until the day John Dillon, the then artistic director of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, and Mamet's friend, visited David Mamet in his house, read it and suggested that they both rewrote it. The play revised was then staged and

directed by John Dillon on April 24, 1980 at the Court Street Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The original version of *Lakeboat* has never been edited or performed again; therefore, the first edition of the play was its revised version in 1979, and the wider public acknowledgement of it only took place in 1980. This fact justifies the inclusion of *Lakeboat* in the period of my analysis. Besides, one must also bear in mind that a play can only acquire public recognition after it is staged before a wide audience, because only then its meanings have the opportunity to acquire (or not) relevance, depending on the impact it makes, by becoming the object of analysis and discussion by the audience, critics and scholars.

Due to geographical and time strictures that obviously impede my close observation of the staged plays (Mamet is not frequently performed in Portugal and I know of no productions of his work which I could have attended during the execution of this project), I have been orientated in my observations by the four film versions of the plays that are presently available. Despite the fact that *Speed-The-Plow* has never been adapted for film, which doesn't allow me to go deeper into some aspects of this particular play, namely in areas such as rhythm, pace and prosody, I have decided to include it in the group of plays under my study because I still believe that it is very representative of Mamet's work and broaches a very pertinent subject. Having completed the work, it seemed to me that it has not been difficult to elicit from the sample provided by the other four available film adaptations all the relevant aspects of language delivery, timing and impact which are central to my analysis in this thesis.

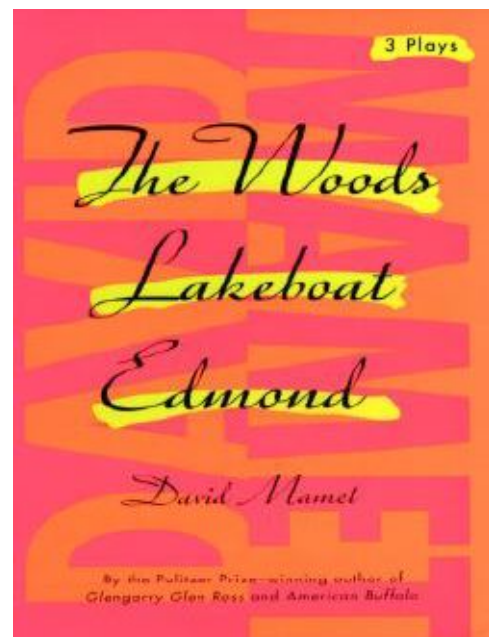
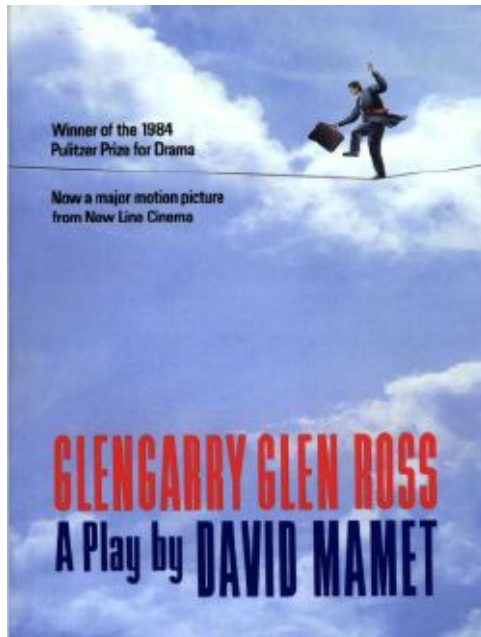
Mamet being always the screenwriter, when not actually the director, of the film versions, these follow very closely the play scripts; although I am well aware that they naturally differ greatly in many aspects from the staged plays, since films are a completely different medium of communication that requires recourse to different techniques to tell the story. As Mamet theorises in his many interviews and essays, in film action is propelled through the camera's perspective (the juxtaposition of shots), and the plot should be understood without the need for words, whereas on stage, action must be propelled by words (the actors' dialogues) and lighting: "The best way to tell a story in a movie is with pictures

without words. It's the best way. The best way to tell a story on stage is with words without plastic elements" (Kane, 2001: 145, 146); that is, "[a] movie script should be a juxtaposition of shots that tell the story" (Mamet, 1991: 4) but "[i]n a play on stage the best way, the only way, the only way really to move the plot forward is through dialogue" (Kane, 2001: 146). However, despite some slight changes in the plot sequence and script and obviously big changes in set design and scene staging - according to the information gathered from the many reviews I have read about the different productions of the different plays, the film versions of the plays are good enough to speak to most of the requirements that I need to accomplish this task; such as, for example, how technically competent actors deliver staccato lines. Although my detailed analysis is informed by observation of the film adaptations of the plays, it is also important to note that I have read many reviews of the plays to recover contemporary reaction to them as well as a sense of the plays as performed. According to the information gathered, the films, however, constitute unique versions that at least linguistically reflect the plays as performed. This has rendered my task easier to accomplish by making it possible for me to assert at least how the lines were on at least one occasion effectively delivered. The fact that the directors of Mamet's plays have almost total freedom to do their job, since Mamet's directions for the plays are almost non-existent, allows each of them to produce his/her own particular version of the same play, which brings about different results that are also received differently by the diverse audiences. Therefore, by attending any production of any of Mamet's plays I would be risking a limited view and interpretation of that play, since Mamet allows for different productions and multiple interpretations. For example, the Harold Pinter production of *Oleanna* in London had a completely different impact on the audience and reviewers than the one produced by David Mamet in New York a year earlier. David and Janice Sauer offer an overview of all the reviews available in their book of the RCT London production, in 1993, in which we can read that

reviewers who had [also] seen the New York production were nearly unanimous in praising this one [London's production] as superior because it "had more balance and ambiguity in the piece" (Taylor) under Pinter's direction. ... [and] "Whereas Mamet directed [...] Carol as a prim, sexless, schoolmarm, Pinter understands that the play is much more disturbing if her gathering confidence allows Carol to develop a sexuality as well as a case"

(*ellipsis*, Sauer, 2003: 235).

Since the screenplays are so close to the play scripts, I have used the latter for all quotations unless otherwise stated.





## Chapter 1

### David Mamet in Mid-Career: A Contextualization

Despite covering many different genres in his prolific writing career, David Mamet, who has in the last few years turned most of his attention to screenwriting and film direction, was first publicly acclaimed as a playwright in the beginning of the 70s. His career as a playwright has been long and he has so far written 43 plays. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define Mamet's mid-career as being in the 80s and early 90s, the period of time during which *Lakeboat* (1980), *Edmond* (1982), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983), *Speed-The-Plow* (1988) and *Oleanna* (1992) were written, staged and received by American and British audiences. By then, Mamet had already written around twenty plays and was in the process of turning to screenwriting, which occurred in 1981 with the production of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, directed by Bob Rafelson and based upon James M. Cain's novel.

David Alan Mamet was born in Chicago, in 1947. His parents divorced when he was ten years old and he spent six years of his childhood living with his mother, stepfather, and sister Lyn in "a brand-new housing development in the southern suburbs" of Chicago (Mamet, 1993b: 4), where he attended high school (Francis W. Parker School). Those were very unhappy and difficult years for Mamet, as he testifies in his book of memoir essays *The Cabin*, in which he tells

stories of physical and psychological violence at home. Mamet discovered acting and got into community theatre in Chicago very early in life, thanks to his uncle Henry, who “was a producer of radio and television in Chicago for the Chicago Board of Rabbis” (Kane, 2001: 196) and who gave him jobs “portraying Jewish children on television and radio” (Kane, 2001: 196). In high school, as he tells us in his essay *The Hotel Lincoln*, he “hung around Second City<sup>1</sup> quite a bit. [He] was friendly with the owners and their family,... [and later] worked there as a busboy, and occasionally [he] played piano for the kids’ shows on the weekend” (*ellipsis*, Mamet, 1993b: 97). Mamet’s early review-like structured plays with short scenes separated by blackouts have admittedly been influenced by Second City’s improvisational troupe and by television:

*all of the sketches seemed to be a seven- or eight-minute sketch, perhaps not coincidentally, like the seven- or eight-minute blackouts of which television was made in those days, which were either dramatic or comedic blackouts. And you had a commercial and you had another scene. And they made a great impression on me. Perhaps that was the human attention span. And you should make your point then get on to another scene* (Kane, 2001: 220).

Mamet goes on to write in *The Hotel Lincoln* that in the early sixties he “was exposed to *la vie bohème* as rendered by the actors at Second City” and later, when it became time for him “to go out into the world” he rented a room at “The Hotel Lincoln”, a place where he had been told many “illuminati of the North Side lived” (Mamet, 1993b: 97). At the age of 20, as an undergraduate at Goddard College, in Vermont, Mamet studied at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre of Sanford Meisner, in New York (Mamet, 1987b: vii), and worked for about a year as a lightening man, and then as the house manager for the Off-Broadway musical *The Fantasticks*. In 1969 he graduated with a B.A. degree from Goddard College - a place he came to love as his home place for the peace and real sense of community he could enjoy there.

In 1970 he was unexpectedly invited to teach drama at Marlboro College, in Vermont, where he produced *Lakeboat*, his second play, for a restricted audience, which had been purposefully written for the job. His first play had been *Camel*, a

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<sup>1</sup> Chicago’s renowned improvisation troupe.



“semisatirical review influenced by Mamet’s experiences at Second City” (Kane, 2004: 16), which his professor agreed to accept in place of his graduation thesis. In 1971-72 he was artist-in-residence in drama at Goddard College. There he co-founded the St. Nicholas Theatre Company with some of his students, namely William Macy and Steven Schachter, who performed the first versions of Mamet’s *Duck Variations* and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and also some of Eugene O’Neil’s plays. In 1972 he returned to Chicago, where he kept on writing and directing several plays at different Theatres. In 1975, *American Buffalo* premiered in Chicago and *Duck Variations* and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* gained further recognition in their off-off-Broadway productions. By then Mamet had already asserted himself as a playwright and his plays were already noticed for their minimalism, the recreation of low-life America and their idiosyncratic dialogues, sometimes marked by some irony, the use of streetwise jargon, carefully crafted for effect, which led some critics to refer to Mamet’s writing style as “Mamet speak”, or to call him “a street poet”. In 1976 he returned to New York, where he had already lived for some time, and where he continued with his work each time becoming more successful and often casting the same group of actors whom he had been used to working with, namely William Macy, Jack Wallace and Joe Mantegna, and usually choosing Gregory Mosher for director and Michael Merritt for the set design. In 1977, the year that Mamet married actress Lindsay Crouse, his work crossed borders with the performance in London of *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Duck Variations*. In 1984, Mamet reached a high-water mark in his career as a playwright with *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which premiered in London first, in 1983, produced and directed by Harold Pinter, and only then in Chicago, in 1984, under the direction of Gregory Mosher. In 1990 Mamet divorced Lindsay Crouse and in 1991 got married to Rebecca Pidgeon, who would star with William Macy in Mamet’s most controversial play, *Oleanna*, in 1992.

Although Mamet had been a baby-boomer, born into a relatively prosperous Jewish-American Chicago home, and given a proper education, during high school, his college years and even after graduation, Mamet took up a vast array of short-term jobs which gave him experience of and insight into the mid-western blue-collar American work ethic. His part-time jobs ranged from working as an

actor, a waiter, a dancer, a backstage gofer, an usher, a cab driver, a sub-editor at “Oui Magazine”, a Merchant Marine sailor to working on the radio, in a bookshop, in a truck factory, in a canning factory, washing windows and selling carpets and real estate over the telephone (*The Cabin* and *Mamet in Conversation*). He has admitted in several interviews and essays to having developed a lot of sympathy for those common people from the lower social classes, whose lives have been a source of inspiration for his plays. Mamet’s life, particularly his family, and his Jewish-Polish origins, have also deeply influenced his work. When questioned about the attention he pays to language in his plays, Mamet explains that maybe his father has had a great influence on him as he was a labor lawyer and an amateur semanticist who insisted that his children chose the exact words to express themselves. He also admits the influence of his grandfather, whom he describes as being “a great talker and storyteller” (Kane, 2001: 140) – just as he claims himself to be: “I am just a storyteller” (Kane, 2001:52) - and which is all that theatre is about, as he had previously stated in the same source “that’s all that theatre is: storytelling” (Kane, 2001: 50).

In the late sixties and in the seventies, under Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter, the USA was undergoing a period of great social upheaval, with increasing rates of unemployment and rising prices, unprecedented social divisions and inequalities. There was the anti-Vietnam War movement, the Watergate scandal, increasing crime and immigration, women’s groups, ethnic minorities and gays increasingly demanding full equal opportunities and asserting their rights to jobs and better educational opportunities. The rising divorce rate forced more and more women into poverty, as they were increasingly becoming sole breadwinners. By the late 1970s, there was great dissatisfaction within an America facing an energy crisis, poor economic performance and the Iranian revolution. These were difficult times for America, and people lost a lot of confidence in the country. As a result of this general discontentment and need for change, topics like abortion, race, homosexuality, sex and religion, once considered taboo, began to be broached in the media. Art, in general, was invaded by minimalist ideas promoted by artists such as Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Robert Smithson, James Turrel, Alice Aycock, Claes Oldenburg and Richard Serra. In literature, the themes revolved

around the hungry materialism and the loneliness of society (Kurt Vonnegut), man's alienation from his spiritual roots, or characters trying to find meaning in a spiritually empty and morally decaying society (John Updike and Joyce Carol Oates) (<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade70.html>). Mamet's plays of this time inevitably reflect the sense of social malaise and the ethos underlying it. In an interview with the highly respected drama critic Ross Wetzsteon, Mamet referred to *American Buffalo* (one of his most acclaimed plays of the 1970s which premiered in Chicago in 1975) in a way that endorses his claim that the founding of America was rooted in violence, and that it constitutes the basis of American culture. He draws a parallel between the powerful, devastating violence of an American past - the golden times of the wild gold rush and the slaughtering of the Buffalo (an American icon) on their way - and the 1970s' no less violent but pitiful and suffocating social scene:

The central metaphor, a rare Buffalo nickel worth several hundred dollars, is one of those clean, precise, yet resonant images an artist can spend a lifetime looking for. Don, who runs a junk shop, sells it to a stranger for ninety dollars, only to realize he's been taken. He and Bob, his gofer, decide the stranger must have a valuable collection of coins and plan to burglarize his apartment. But Don's friend Teach, a more experienced burglar, convinces Don to drop Bob from the deal, to take him along instead. The play ends in frustrated violence, in a kind of spiritual entropy that stunningly evokes the contrast between the open-sky, spacious, whoopingly rapacious violence of the American past (the buffalo) and the airless, petty impotence of the bourgeois culture it grew into (the junk shop), (Kane, 2001: 11,12).

About the same play, he also concludes that it is "about loyalty and responsibility, about the relationship between money and business and violence", and that "we should treat human beings with love and respect and never hurt them. I hope *American Buffalo* shows that, by showing what happens when you fail to act that way" (Kane, 2001: 11, 12).

Another comparison between the same play and the society of the time is traced in an interview between the author and critic Henry Hewes. There, Mamet implies that, in the American myth, people who strive to succeed, even by criminal means, and do well are praised, but those who strive to succeed and fail are punished. So, he elaborates by saying that what is "absurd" is not whether criminals fail or succeed in their quests, but the impunity of the criminality

prevailing which exists at all levels of society, which says something about the moral principles of the nation.

Hewes: In this case [*Buffalo*] you have three ineffectual people using these slogans so that they become patently absurd, whereas when you have [Richard] Nixon and [H. R.] Haldeman and [John] Erlichman doing it [in the Watergate break-in and cover-up] it's not so absurd.

Mamet: But that's the American myth again, Henry. The question is, here are people who are engaged in theft, and you say that they are absurd because they failed. The question is, would they be more laudable if they succeed?

My point in the play is that as much as we might not like to think so, these people are us. And, as Thorstein Veblen says, the behaviour on this level, in the lumpenproletariat, the delinquent class, and the behaviour on the highest levels of society, in the most rarefied atmospheres of the board room and the most rarefied atmospheres of the leisure class, is exactly identical. The people who create nothing, the people who do nothing, the people who have all sorts of myths at their disposal to justify themselves and their predators – and they steal from us. They rob the country spiritually, and they rob the country financially (*ellipsis*, Kane, 2001: 24, 25).

*Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974) is another Mamet's play that follows the trends of the time, as it openly examines sexuality, the sex lives of two men and two women, their intimate relationships and underlying fears and misunderstandings. And *Lakeboat*, as a play the earlier version of which dates back to the very late 1960s and still reflects the then young and dilettante author's living experience, reveals in the voices of its characters some of the socio-economic concerns of the time. In the play one can find references to rising prices (175), social divisions (206), divorce (173, 174), sex (Scene 10), homosexuality (205), and criminality (scene 11).

In the 1980s America witnessed a political and economic turning point, which perhaps had an even deeper effect on people's lives and morality. David Mamet was in his 30s, a mature and insightful playwright, and he wasn't indifferent to the changes that Reaganomics were bringing to society. The plays he would write during that period would, as usual, confront the audiences with "slices" of a constructed reality onstage where they could "go to hear the truth" (Kane, 2001: 33), and ponder what they heard.

Under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, free market policies, freedom from government regulation, and personal freedoms in general were promoted, allowing

Americans to go through a period of blooming capitalism, the cutting of taxes and of governmental interference, and a revival of American patriotism, which was also promoted in the production of action movies like *Rambo* and *Rocky*, and their sequels, all of which were about overcoming national traumas and restoring American pride - which was felt to have happened by the end of the decade. With the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the end of Eastern European communism, America was then confident and dominating the world. Nevertheless, Reagan's policies were intended to cut the cost of labour and, when not actually increasing unemployment rates, did a great deal to make work more precarious. Moreover, hostile takeovers, leveraged buyouts, and mega-mergers produced a new breed of billionaire who became models for a whole generation of status-seekers. Binge buying and over-extended credit became a common practice among Americans who, according to a study carried out by UCLA and American Council on Education in 1980, "were more interested in status, power, and money than at any time during the past 15 years" (<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade80.html>), and considered Business Management the most promising college major.

At that time of ferocious capitalism and self-centredness, violent crime rates continued to climb and prisons overflowed. However, some of the 1970s social reforms went on apace. According to the source cited above, "efforts to censor books tripled in the eighties and Roget's Thesaurus banned sexist categories: mankind became humankind; countryman became country dweller". Similarly, there was great concern with gender neutrality in writing and interpersonal behaviour that could be construed as sexual in nature or intent. Columbia University, the last all-male school, began accepting women in 1983, as the latter began reaching important positions at national level. In fact, by the 1990s, one could find in higher education the full expression of social modifications in the gender roles. Many women had successfully fought for more opportunities in higher education aiming at establishing their own independent, intellectual, social and economic identities. However, by then, higher education had acquired a whole new significance as Ronald Reagan's policy for Universities was not necessarily intended to develop students' intellectual capacities, but to provide them with the

necessary skills to face the world of work and improve the nation's labour force. His aim was purely economic and that idea passed on to the student body who sought to get economically rewarding jobs through college education.

These are some of the political and socio-economic shifts that Mamet allows to permeate plays like *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Speed-The-Plow*, *Edmond*, and *Oleanna*, since he is "interested in studying what man has become as a result of his social surroundings" (Styan, 1981: 67). Here one can witness the scams, trickery, manipulation, ploys and hypocrisy humanity is capable of in order to pursue strong individual desires: their love of making money, hunger for success and power. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the action of which takes place in and around a real estate office in Chicago, Mamet depicts a decaying business ethic as a result of the free enterprise system, which encourages a ferocious competitiveness and "savagery, under a guise of civilised conduct" (Demastes, 1988: 86). Scams, confidence tricks and crime underlie the action of the play, whose practical sales maxim is "ALWAYS BE CLOSING" (Mamet, 1984: 13). In *Speed-The-Plow*, one can witness the manipulations of the Hollywood movie business, which Mamet also already knew well, and the craving for power, recognition, money and success. In *Oleanna* one can identify the themes of higher education, its ideals and its social role, sexual harassment, political correctness and book censorship, and social marks of the time like women asserting themselves to attain real social equality and power, allusion to feminist groups, the male-female conflicting relationships and even physical violence. Despite being a very different play from the others, for its fable-like structure and content, which reminds us of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, in *Edmond* the playwright broaches social issues like political correctness, prejudice, racism, sex industry, homosexuality, the world of crime, prison and life inside it. About it Mamet says "*Edmond* is a morality play about modern society. Jung said that sometimes it really is *not* the individual who is sick. I don't know whether I believe that completely or not, but that is what *Edmond* is about – a man trying to discover himself and what he views as a sick society (Kane, 2001: 68). To some critics, this play seemed like a response to the atmosphere of rigid political correctness of the time and a tool to confront people with, or raise people's awareness to the vices, decadence and alienation that big

cities generate.

Mamet was well aware of the hypocritical and ruthless nature of Reagan's capitalistic policies. When he talks about the thematic concerns present in *Glengarry Glen Ross* and says:

The play concerns how business corrupts, how the hierarchical business system tends to corrupt. It becomes legitimate for those in power in the business world to act unethically. The effect on the little guy is that he turns to crime. And petty crime goes punished; major crimes go unpunished (Kane, 2001: 47).

Apparently, he had already also been the hapless practitioner of Reagonomics *avant la lettre*. In an interview with television reporter Jim Lehrer, in 1987, when questioned about *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Mamet states

I once worked in a fraudulent land sales organization ...I was faced with two choices, either get over your scruples or get out of the job. And at that point I got over my scruples (*ellipsis*, Kane, 2001: 89).

When David Savran, in a 1987 interview, compared David Mamet to Arthur Miller, one of his admitted influences, Mamet stated that they had a very different view on writing. Whereas Miller saw writing as "a tool of conscience", "a tool for the betterment of social conditions", Mamet believed his plays weren't going "to change anybody's social conditions", that "the purpose of theatre, as Stanislavsky said, is to bring to the stage the life of the soul", which might or might not make citizens better people. In this sequence, Savran asked him: "So it might have indirectly a political impact by making people more aware?" - to which he answered: "Yes. I wished that I could write that kind of play. I tried it once in a while. *Edmond* is an example" (Kane, 2001: 73, 74). In saying this, Mamet is somehow contradicting his former statement and admitting his wish to have a socially interventive role. Although Mamet claims not to produce politically engaged theatre ('agitprop', to detractors of writers like Bertolt Brecht or Clifford Odets), despite his leftist ideologies at that time, he tries to espouse a certain theatrical theory in which the playwright's job is not to be political, or change people's minds, but to address "spiritual problems", or "problems of the soul". He states that "[t]he purpose of the theatre is not primarily to deal with social issues; it's to deal with spiritual issues" (Kane:2001, 54). In practice, and since his plays

are in such close contact with the realities of everyday existence, this tends to make them, whether he likes it or not, 'engaged' work. For example, when asked by Henry Schvey, in 1986, if he saw his plays as being iconoclastic, he answered "Sure. In the sense of tearing down the icons of American Business and some of the myths about this country. This is one of the jobs of the writer. To lead people to question their own values" (Kane, 2001:71). Commenting on Mamet's self-proclaimed iconoclasm, Quinn contends that that "is a kind of doctrine informed by a system of ritualized liberal dissent in which membership in the national tradition depends upon a declared rejection of the current state of cultural affairs" (Bloom, 2004: 96), and that he is part of a very common pattern in theatrical history "of community formation through dissent – the rejection of American culture in the name of American values" (94). But what makes him different from political writers is that he "has the ability to construct the current scene as moribund, in a kind of statement that is not argued but rather performed" (96).

When in 1984 *Glengarry Glen Ross* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize on Broadway, Mamet was asked in an interview about the reason why the myth of the American Dream seemed central to his artistic vision. In answer to this, he clearly explained his concern about and view of the American ethos of the time, its lack of communality and of honesty:

It interests me because the national culture is founded very much on the idea of strive to succeed. Instead of rising with the masses, one should rise from the masses. Your extremity is my opportunity. That's what forms the basis of our economic life, and this is what forms the rest of our lives. That American myth: the idea of something out of nothing. And this also affects the spirit of the individual. It's very divisive. One feels one can only succeed at the cost of someone else. Economic life in America is a lottery. Everyone's got an equal chance, but only one guy is going to get to the top. "The more I have the less you have." So one can only succeed at the cost of, the failure of another, which is what a lot of my plays – *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* – are about. That's what Acting President Reagan's whole campaign is about (Kane, 2001: 46, 47).

Although Mamet seemed well aware of the hypocrisy and self-interest at the core of the American culture of that time, and wished to expose a country whose policies had helped the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer, somehow, in his plays, although he critiques the petty criminals, he also reveals some



admiration and sympathy for the blue-collar working-class from which they come, the same in which he has himself been brought up, and whose oppressing experiences and despair he has also witnessed (and experienced). But Mamet holds the belief that it is possible “to create an economic system that is not brutal” if big cities gave way to small communities, where everybody knew each other personally and relied on one another.

It has been done in the past. At various times in history there was a sufficient stasis, a sufficient equilibrium between that which people possessed and that which they desired. It’s kind of an anarchistic view, in that these people I’m thinking of lived in small communities and were capable of making their own ad hoc logical rules and regulations. I live in a small town in Vermont where people can do business by giving their word, leaving a check at the post office, calling up the bank and saying, “Will you send me this money?” One reason they can do this is common sense. If you live in a community where you are dependent on the same people day in and day out, then it’s common sense that those people would deal honestly with each other (Kane, 2001: 78).

Most people know, from experience, that it is easier to relate with and rely on people in close-knit societies than in big impersonal societies. However, this wish for a return to the past sounds too idyllic as a solution for the prevailing brutality of urban society. As history has proved, people tend to congregate in big cities and a degree of social downshifting is almost inevitable. Thus, it seems to me that a better solution to the problem must be sought, if there is any solution, because as far as historic reports go, there have always been brutal societies in the world and nobody has yet found a universally applicable solution to the problem. Yet, theatre can go on playing its role and do as Mamet also suggests in

#### *Writing in Restaurants*

In a morally bankrupt time we can help to change the habit of coercive and frightened action and substitute for it the habit of trust, self-reliance, and co-operation.

If we are true to our ideals we can help to form an ideal society – a society based on and adhering to ethical first principles - not by *preaching* about it, but by *creating* it each night in front of the audience – by showing how it works. In action (Mamet, 1987b: 27).

In 1985, David Mamet and William Macy found the not-for-profit Atlantic Theater Company in New York City, whose mission was to produce great plays

simply performed by an artistic ensemble. The founding of this Theatre was inspired by the Group Theatre and the Stanislavsky method, which was the one Mamet had studied at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre of Sanford Meisner, in New York, during his college years, and which has greatly influenced his theories about theatre. The Group Theatre was a company based on an ensemble approach to acting which used a highly personal and cooperative method. The cast should have relationships off-stage so that they became familiar and their performances on stage would be more “real”, would reflect their familiarity and be more believable. The Group Theatre plays also reconstructed the language and circumstances of the working classes. Broadly speaking, the Stanislavsky method of acting consisted in avoiding all extraneous propensity to deviate from the main theme and supplying truthful feelings by recalling their own experiences under like or related circumstances in order to achieve a more genuine performance.

In the later 1990s and afterwards Mamet’s work and life have both tended towards a stronger public assertion of his Jewishness, a nostalgic reconciliation with his origins and past, and a more conservative and resigned attitude. In spite of having accustomed his audiences to depictions of a predominantly male world, he has even written an all-female play, *Boston Marriage*, which he directed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1999. About this play, whose title is an American expression used to refer to two women living together, reviewers like M. S. Mason and Terry Byrne state that the play “does for hard-edged female characters what many of his [Mamet’s] others have done for hard-edged males – expose the cruelty, venality, and predatory impulses in them”, or “these gals exhibit as much testosterone as any Mamet male.” (Sauer, 2003: 78). Mamet has also accommodated himself to the Hollywood business, which he had so openly criticized for its unethical procedures. Since he has started his career in the movie business, he has produced, directed or written about 26 movies, including the film versions of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Oleanna*, *Lakeboat*, and *Edmond*. Mamet has even received an Academy Award nomination for his first script *The Verdict*, one year after his cinema debut. Mamet is also the creator, writer and co-producer of the television action-adventure series *The Unit*.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Mamet and the Object of Drama**

#### **2.1. Theatre's Place in Wider American Culture**

Theatre in the 1960s and up to mid-1970s was flourishing in America. Drama became part of the curriculum in many Universities, schools of drama popped up everywhere, and new companies appeared doing all sorts of experimental work. Young Americans were then open to all sorts of experiments and voices; they were eager for change, everything was possible and acceptable in America as traditional forms of public censorship weakened. Those were times of great upheaval; people were disillusioned with the system, and needed to express their discontentment. Theatre was a good vehicle for contestation of the social structures; plays had something to say about the world people lived in, and some playwrights such as Peter Schuman, R. G. Davis or Clifford Odets, had already engaged in agitprop-style plays to express their leftist ideologies. Drama in the 1960s and 1970s had a very powerful social function and the idea of social justice had to be held up before the widest possible audience. Since Broadway had become extremely expensive, particularly for the flourishing experimental amateur avant-garde productions, Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway theatres developed, spread and productions increased steadily, thanks to that cheaper alternative. As theatre expanded outside New York City, there were more actors and theatre companies working outside it than in it. One of the most prestigious playwrights of the sixties was Edward Albee, whose work reveals some common points with that of David Mamet, who, as a baby boomer himself, is also a product of that time. In the 1970s, David Mamet was part of the decentralisation of national theatre from New York to Chicago, where he acquired and maintained his reputation as a playwright. There he endorsed non-profit theatres and helped many rootless professional communities to establish themselves.

The North American population at large (the masses), have not traditionally been theatre-goers, they haven't developed much the taste for that form of art, and

the only period during which theatre was consistently subsidized by government was after the Great Depression, as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies. Therefore, theatre in that cultural context has never come to occupy the position it occupies in Great Britain, where theatre has a huge tradition and enjoys government subsidies. Despite being a niche in American cultural and intellectual life, its prospects in the 1970s were quite different from those of the 1980s. About this period of rising prices, fierce capitalism and increasing authoritarianism, Mamet contends that "the direction of American drama is the same as that of the American culture" (Kane, 2001: 63) - the one his plays state but do not argue - and that if one dared oppose it (American culture) and declare this opposition openly, one would not have a chance to survive in the theatre in those days. He also remarked that the community of theatre-goers in New York has already disappeared and given way to transients. So, serious plays no longer have a place in New York, which "now caters for transients" (87). Despite this fact, he admits being privileged because his plays are still very well accepted on Broadway and Chicago. Mamet admits that people in the 1980s are much less interested in theatre than they are in movies, and that the film industry became the privileged means of entertainment elected by the masses for talking to the masses (87).

The fact that Mamet has moved into film in the 1980s and later to television, may suggest that he has turned into a commercial artist, as many other playwrights have done before him, and still do. The movie business is where the money is and, some would argue, theatre is where talented and creative people work. Therefore, the practice is for the film producers to search for the most talented people in the theatre and tempt them away with amounts of money which often cause the latter to succumb to ambition and greed and leads them to compromise their independence, creativity and ideals. As politics is not a priority for the American movie business, successful playwrights like Mamet are more silent in the cinema than on the stage. Thus, apart from Mamet's adaptations for the cinema of his own plays, other films he was involved with like *The Verdict*, a courtroom drama, *The Winslow Boy*, another courtroom drama, or *The Untouchables*, a crime film, turned out to be largely commercial projects. Although he claims that in the theatre the playwright is a kind of privileged "Yertle the

Turtle”<sup>2</sup> - as she/he chooses the director, and through her/him the cast, and influences all aspects of the production - in the movie business, a screenwriter is treated like a secretary, she/he is devalued, has no power at all, and if they don’t like her/his job they just throw her/him out (88). However, he doesn’t deny his fascination for both forms of expression. In the movie business he likes the fact that he has to work with a huge amount of people, that it is very technical, and that it calls for a lot of different mechanical ways of thinking (121) and, in the theatre, as a traditionally communal playwright, he likes the fact that he can work with the same people time after time. So, he admits that what he would really like to keep on doing was to direct movies and to teach in the theatre (90). But Mamet has revealed himself a more talented playwright than a screenwriter. Unlike most of his films, his plays have often been very successful, and maybe because he first acquired his reputation as a playwright that seems to be his natural environment.

## **2.2. Influential Playwrights in Mamet’s Work**

Mamet’s work as a playwright has often been compared to that of many other playwrights, namely Eugene O’Neil, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, Clifford Odets, Samuel Beckett, Landford Wilson, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. About Eugene O’Neil, John Lahr, a well-known theatre critic, claims that he “was the first to stage the life and the idiom of the American lower classes ... the first to challenge the soullessness of the century’s materialism” (*ellipsis*, Eyre, 2000: 143), and Eyre and Wright claim that “O’Neil wanted the audience to feel that all our lives are a struggle against forces that we can never control” (Eyre, 2000: 148). Although one may find in the first commentary an analogy with Mamet’s dramatic object which seems to endorse the playwrights’ proximity, since Mamet also uses American vernacular and often portrays the life of people on the fringes of society and their crafty ways to survive in that same society, as to the second

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<sup>2</sup> The king of the pond in the 1958’s children’s picture book by Dr Seuss – pseudonym for Theodor Geisel – in which the turtle king believed himself to be the ruler of every thing and every land his eyes could reach, and, unsatisfied, he ordered nine turtles to stand on one another’s back so that he could climb up, see beyond his pond and congratulate himself on what a marvellous ruler he was.

commentary, I would say that O’Neil’s view of society’s hopelessness seems a lot more pessimistic than the one Mamet constructs, who despite displaying the same social evils, offers no overt clues or comments about society’s hopelessness; and, on the contrary, his underlying message seems to be that life doesn’t necessarily have to be “a struggle” against anything or anybody. Christopher Bigsby also finds common ground between Eugene O’Neil and David Mamet in the language they use; he claims that they are both “less concerned with generating a theatre of action than with creating dramatic poems” and “orchestrating human voices” (Bigsby, 1985b: 252). While comparing the work of Edward Albee with that of David Mamet, Christopher Bigsby notes that they are both “concerned with language as poetry”, with “rhythms” that are carefully and consciously calculated so as to have a musical analogy, with “the examination of the failure of the American Dream, the decay of American revolutionary principles and American spiritual pieties”, and with “abortive attempts at communication”; they are both “poets of loss” to whom “the fusion of lyricism and a linguistic brutalism help offer an elegy for a world in a state of decay” (253). However, whereas Albee openly insists on the need to replace materialistic values for the lost spiritual and moral principles, according to Bigsby Mamet offers

fewer direct encomiums to moral principles, presumed to operate in a not too distant past, fewer direct injunctions to human contact and the necessity to engage the real, ... [which is] implied in the very stress on the fact of loss and in the need for companionship felt by characters who cannot articulate it for fear of the vulnerability which this will suggest (*ellipsis*: 253).

Still commenting on Mamet’s work, Bigsby also compares it with that of Sam Shepard. To him, they both register “the gulf both between the sexes and between an inherited language of aggressive masculinity and needs that could barely be articulated” (Bigsby, 2004: 4). Mamet’s work also seems to bear some marks of Harold Pinter (who is also of Jewish origin) in the sense that they both are “concerned with power and the degree to which language is implicated in its operations (4). To Eyre, Pinter and Mamet’s language also have much in common for the fact that they both use “musical scores with pauses, italics for emphases, dashes and dots for overlapping and interruption” to “delineate the intention by correctly delineating the rhythm of the speech” (Eyre, 200: 231). Although Mamet

is not a manifest political writer like Arthur Miller (also of Jewish origin) or Clifford Odets, who believed drama was a direct agent of social change, “a mechanism for exposing truths which once understood would spur those who watched to transform both the agencies and philosophy of government” (4) – no wonder that in more fascistic times, they ended up blacklisted and summoned to testify before the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) – he is an admirer of Odet’s “sculpted language” and is apprehensive about the commercial and materialistic forces generated by capitalism (4). Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross* is also often compared to Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, for they both capture the ruthlessness of a capitalistic system that victimizes the lives of the salesmen and damages both their individual decency and social relationships. However, Miller, as a more intimate and confessional playwright, depicts a 1940s domestic scenario which uncovers the hypocrisy of the American Dream and the tragic determination of American society to cling on to illusions instead of facing realities. The protagonist believes in a world of equal material opportunity for everyone, a dream he is unable to accomplish and which leads to his tragic downfall. By 1983, America had turned into a much more nakedly aggressive society than that of Post-Depression era, one of ruthless competitiveness and greed trickling down from top to bottom of US economic life, and that is the scenario of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Here, Mamet’s characters, except for Levene, reveal no domestic life; they live to keep their jobs and to make money, sometimes in the most unscrupulous manner.

### **2.3. The Object of Drama in Mamet’s Plays**

Although Mamet’s drama is not overtly political, the apparently simple way he reconstructs life on stage requires a more attentive analysis which leads to the recognition of the metaphorical heart of his plays; Mamet calls for the return of America’s lost spiritual values, for morality, decency and truth, by omitting their existence from the life he portrays on stage. According to Bigsby, Mamet is concerned with “probing American myth and reality, with charting the collapse of value and the anguished facts of personal despair” in a moral and aesthetic

concern and desire to “expose the gulf between appearance and reality”, “to penetrate the fiction that is America” (Biggsby, 1985 b.: 275). William Demastes, who also comments on Mamet’s dramatic objectives, seems to agree with Christopher Biggsby and suggests that

David Mamet is a writer interested in studying what man has become as a result of his social surroundings. But unlike the old realists and more like his contemporary, David Rabe, Mamet is less concerned with social issues per se than he is with uncovering how these social concerns have actually taken over and corrupted/destroyed the men and women of that society and then cut them free. Mamet himself argues, “The purpose of the theater is not primarily to deal with social issues; it’s to deal with spiritual issues” (Demastes, 1988: 67).

To Mamet, everything in a play must serve a purpose; a playwright or an actor must not be constrained by the need to be truthful to an external reality, their concern must solely lie in making the necessary and meaningful choices to pursue the objective of the play; as to him

Everything which does not put forward the meaning of the play impedes the meaning of the play. To do too much or too little is to mitigate and weaken the meaning. The acting, the design, the direction should all consist only of that bare minimum necessary to put forward the action. Anything else is embellishment” (Mamet, 1987: 132).

Thus, having pruned redundancies, Mamet gives cast and crew space to be themselves, to be creative, to feel released rather than constrained by externally prescribed imperatives.

Mamet’s main concern as a dramatist doesn’t reside in being representational, or developing a plot, but in dealing with moral matters. He usually reconstructs apparently common daily situations, in the face of which the audience is implicitly called to find a meaning, to decide upon, to judge, approve of, to condemn, or to take a side; as to him “the revelation of the deep meaning of the ordinary, gives the play its power” (Mamet, 2000: 67). Therefore, the audience’s role must not be that of a mere witness, but that of a participant in the play who enjoys “the happiness of being a participant in the process of *solution*, rather than the intellectual achievement of having observed the process of construction” (Mamet, 1987b: 14). Mamet’s task is not to imply a single idea of what is right and



what is wrong, but to allow the audience to reflect upon those same situations and make their own judgements, reach their own conclusions. By leaving to the audiences the inference of the meaning of a play, Mamet is opening doors to multiple interpretations of the same play, or sometimes even to some controversy concerning the undisclosed aim of the author, which clearly was the case with *Oleanna*. But to Mamet, as Carroll says while citing him, “no subject is a fit subject for drama which does not involve a possible choice” (Carroll, 1987: 20) both for the character and the audience.

While building his characters verbally, resorting to a particular kind of dialogue/language and depicting the “unremarkable”, Mamet makes a thorough analysis of social interaction. He locates the individual within a social context and explores the interrelationships between “private [personal] and public [social] experience”, which illustrates the effects of a particular kind of society and implies, in his work, that people are both “the outcomes and the servants of economic forces” (Peacock, 1997: 136).

Mamet’s dramatic object is often found in extracts of books, in popular songs, or in maxims, that serve as metaphors or allegories for the play, which the author composes as their titles or writes at their beginning as a kind of preliminary statement or epigram. *Lakeboat*, whose origin I have already considered in the Introduction to this dissertation, is not one of these cases, although the title of the play itself can be interpreted as an allusion to an enclosed environment - since lakeboats seem to have no long distances to cover or distant horizons to aim at, as they are confined to a lake. That confinement or enclosure hints at the type of environment the seamen have to endure, and not only in an external, but also in an internal sense. The play is dedicated to Larry Shue – a playwright-in-residence at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater - and to John Dillon - who has directed it on April 24, 1980 at the Court Street Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The play develops in 28 scenes - which confer on it an episodic structure. It is set aboard a lakeboat on the Great Lakes, specifically in the engine room, the galley, the fantail, the boat deck and at the rail. The play depicts life amongst the seven seamen aboard and the Pierman.

*Edmond*, dedicated to Richard Nelson (an award-winning American

playwright and then the chair of the playwriting department at the Yale School of Drama) and Wally Shawn (an American actor and playwright whose work is often dark, politically charged and controversial), premiered at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago on June 4, 1982. This production was directed by Gregory Mosher. *Edmond* won two Village Voice Off-Broadway awards (Obie Awards) in 1982-83 for best new American play and for best direction. The play is set in New York City and develops in twenty-three scenes – which also confer on it an episodic structure - with twenty-nine characters role-played by eleven actors (four women and seven men). *Edmond's* epigram is an excerpt of the popular song:

“Hokey Pokey Wicky Wamm  
Salacapinkus Muley Comm/  
Tamsey Wamsey Wierey Wamm  
King of the Cannibal Islands”.

This song was originally a broadside ballad entitled “the King of the Cannibal Islands”, published and sold in 1858 in Glasgow. It is about a hated polygamous king who goes mad because of the hundred “as black as soot” wives and the many children he has. Half of the King’s wives die and then he invites all his subjects to the roast. At the end, his other fifty wives escape with the island chiefs. The king sends his guards out into the woods to kill his other fifty wives and the fifty chiefs. The guards cut their heads off while the king laughs to see the fun. Every night the ghosts of the headless wives and chiefs creep into the King’s bed. This popular song seems to encapsulate *Edmond's* nightmarish, insane and surreal episodic life, which is apparently and ironically driven by his wish for sex (not love) as a means of achieving happiness and fulfilment, since he decides to abandon his wife after many years of companionship, under the influence of a fortune-teller who convinces him that he is not where he belongs, and on the grounds that his wife has stopped interesting him “spiritually or sexually” and that he has “had enough” (Mamet, 1987a: 224). In addition, and according to Anne Dean, there is also little doubt that “*Edmond*” is named after Edmund Burke, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Irish conservative writer and political philosopher who appealed throughout his life to order and stability, advocating that “the extreme of liberty obtains nowhere”, “extremes ... are destructive both to virtue and enjoyment”, “liberty ... must be limited in order to be possessed” and “[g]ood order is the foundation of all things.”

(Dean, 1990: 173). In fact, in Scene 18, on page 280, he declares himself to be “Edmond Burke” and, in Scene 22, on page 291, he introduces himself to a certain “Mrs. Brown” as “Eddie Burke.”

*Glengarry Glen Ross*, dedicated to Harold Pinter, was first staged at the Cottesloe Theatre, RNT London, on September 21, 1983. This production was directed by Bill Bryden. The US premiere of the play took place at the Goodman Theatre of the Arts Institute of Chicago on February 6, 1984, and it was directed by Gregory Mosher. *Glengarry Glen Ross* was a multi-award winning play (six) which depicts the business practices of a Chicagoan real estate office and the relationships established amongst seven characters (4 of whom are salesmen). It is divided into two Acts; the three scenes of Act One are set in a Chinese restaurant across the street from the real estate office where Act Two takes place. *Glengarry Glen Ross*, whose title comes from the names of two of the real estate developments being peddled by the salesmen characters - Glengarry Highlands and Glen Ross Farms, presents as an epigram the maxim: “‘ALWAYS BE CLOSING’ Practical Sales Maxim”, which encapsulates the permanent and aggressive business ethics of the four realtors in the play.

*Speed-the-Plow*, dedicated to Howard Rosenstone, a theatrical literary agent who helped David Mamet get his works produced on stage, was first produced by the Lincoln Centre Theatre at the Royale Theatre, on Broadway, New York. It previewed on April 9 of 1988 for 24 performances, and opened May 2 of the same year for 278 more performances, running until December 31, 1988. This production was also directed by Gregory Mosher. The three-character play, which is a satirical portrait of the American movie business, is divided into three Acts and it is set in Hollywood, Los Angeles. Act One takes place at Gould’s office, in the morning; Act Two takes place at Gould’s home, in the evening; and Act Three takes place the next morning, back at Gould’s office. *Speed-the-Plow* contains an epigram by William Makepeace Thackeray, from his novel *Pendennis*, which consists of a philosophical analysis of people’s possible and disparate attitudes to life that applies to the characters in the play. It starts: “Which is the most reasonable, and does his duty best: he who stands aloof from the struggle of life, calmly contemplating it, or he who descends to the ground, and takes his part in

the contest?" In fact, Gould finds himself on both sides of this dilemma; at times in the play he "stands aloof," with a more ethic and detached attitude towards material possessions and, at other times, he "takes part" in life's contest, with a more earthly and unethical attitude.

*Oleanna*, dedicated to the memory of Michael Merritt, Mamet's then recently deceased favourite set designer, premiered at The Hasty Pudding, Cambridge, Massachusetts, on May 1, 1992. It was produced by the Back Bay Theatre Company in association with American Repertory Theatre, and directed by David Mamet himself. This two-character play, which stages a male-female (professor and student) confrontation in an academic setting, namely inside a professor's single-room office, is divided into three Acts. *Oleanna* was originally subtitled "A Power Play", which could serve as an interpretation of the relationship established between the two characters throughout the play. However, the title of the play itself derives from Mamet's choice to use an epigram, this time the title itself, to hint at the meaning of the play. Therefore, although there seems to be different interpretations of the title of the play, the most commonly accepted version amongst the critics of Mamet's work is that it is inspired by a folk song, which Mamet quotes in the introductory pages of the published play:

"Oh, to be in *Oleanna*,  
That's where I would rather be.  
Than be bound in Norway  
And drag the chains of slavery."

This folk song is seen by critics as an escapist vision of an ideal/utopian society, here applied to the (also failing) utopian dream of academia, since *Oleanna* was the name of a 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian agricultural community of the Midwest founded by the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull and his wife Anna - thus "Oleanna" - who eventually had to return to Norway because the land they had bought was rocky and infertile – a recurrent hint of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Therefore, it seems that *Oleanna* is connected to the contrasting suggestion of an ideal world, of equal opportunity (as epitomized in the myth of the American Dream), and the oppression of the real world - to which they (Carol and John) are naturally bound, and of which they are representatives, as they are both locked in a primal struggle for the rewards of that idealised world. Mamet's ironical use of the utopian myth

seems to be confirmed by the other epigram of the play, a quotation from Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, on the limits of moral vision, which also conveys a particularly oppressive atmosphere. Indeed, it suggests that the children who have never experienced "a genial mental atmosphere" are unable to recognise its absence and can easily be made to believe that their unhappiness is caused by "their own sinfulness."

The want of fresh air does not seem much to affect the happiness of children in a London alley: the greater part of them sing and play as though they were on a moor in Scotland. So the absence of a genial mental atmosphere is not commonly recognised by children who have never known it. Young people have a marvellous faculty of either dying or adapting themselves to circumstances. Even if they are unhappy—very unhappy—it is astonishing how easily they can be prevented from finding it out, or at any rate from attributing it to any other cause than their own sinfulness.

Purposefully denying others' access to truth, knowledge or proper education, disregarding the fact that people's ignorance can bring long-term harmful effects to society, is a highly irresponsible attitude. Although the question of American education is not the central theme of the play, but just a vehicle to expose the playwright's dramatic object, which in *Oleanna* is the desire for both power and understanding in human relationships, undermined by people's natural self-centeredness, the inclusion of this epigram calls one's attention to people's hunger for power, prestige and authority, and to the harmful consequences of a failing, discredited and fraudulent American educational system. Furthermore, *Oleanna* was staged a year after the Anita Hill – Clarence Thomas hearings, and although David Mamet maintains that he started *Oleanna* months before the Hill-Thomas affair and that the hearings merely provided an impetus to finish the play, *Oleanna* is still seen by some critics as a caricature of this heavily media-covered event.

## Chapter 3

### Mamet's Linguistic Style

#### 3.1. Dialogue and Scene Setting/Building

Within the historical framework of contemporary American theatre, Mamet is regarded as something of a minimalist, as stated in a highly recognized site about Contemporary American Drama<sup>3</sup>. This minimalism comprehends not only the author's widely proclaimed ideas on acting and directing, but also all formal aspects of his plays: the written directions, the number of characters usually involved, structure, time, space, and the use of language (dialogue); to him, as I have already stated on page 17, "[t]he best way to tell a story on stage is with words without plastic elements" (Kane, 2001: 146) and "[i]t is the strength to resist the extraneous that renders acting powerful and beautiful" (Mamet, 1994: 267).

Maybe as a result of the playwright's minimalist style and of his taste for playing with words, as he claims to have inherited his father's taste for semantics, dialogue constitutes the fundamental tool in Mamet's reconstruction of American society on stage. It is through these verbal interactions that the scenes of the plays are built, the context is set, action is propelled, the relationship amongst characters is delineated, their personal motivations revealed, and that audiences are puzzled or enlightened.

Contexts are not verbally explained or introduced to the audience right from the start. It is often the suggestive props of the setting and the development of the verbal interchanges amongst characters that allow the audience to infer or become aware of what is going on.

In *Speed-The-Plow*, the audience is introduced to what at first sight seems incomprehensible talk read from a book that "it's not quite 'Art' and it's not quite 'Entertainment'" (3). It is not until after some verbal interchanges between the two protagonists on stage that we are allowed to understand both what their "business"

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fb10.unibremen.de/anglistik/kerkhoff/ContempDrama/DRHistory.htm>

is and why Gould is reading from that book. The same strategy is adopted in *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Oleanna*. In the former, scenes begin in the middle of the action and, in the first act, the setting (a bar) is not in itself sufficient context to reveal the meaning or purpose of what is being said. It is not until the dialogue moves forward that the characters' conversation begins to make sense. In *Oleanna*, the first and second acts also begin in the middle of a conversation, and the third act begins with a very difficult attempt to establish communication after some intervening breakdown. Again, only after some time can we understand what is going on and the purpose of it.

In *Lakeboat* and *Edmond*, maybe because of their episodic nature, Mamet resorts to a more straightforward strategy to contextualize their multiple and very short scenes. In *Lakeboat* the scenes usually begin with a question that introduces the topic of the conversation: "Did you hear about Skippy and the new kid?" (129), or "What do you do down here?" (156), or a statement requiring a comment or further information on the subject: "So, the way I hear it: she told him she was divorced. How about that" (152), "I heard the cook has two Cadillac Eldorados" (171), "I'm going to *tell* you: Jonnie Fast is the strongest guy in ten years" (178), or "Hey, Dale. I heard the Steward's in charge of First Aid" (199). The recurrence of the words "heard" or "tell" in the utterances that introduce the scenes is a significant pattern that also helps define the nature of their content. In effect, in almost all scenes of the play, the characters engage in telling or listening to (and sometimes participating in) stories either about themselves or other people; often hearsay stories. In *Edmond*, although some scenes also begin in the middle of the action, their beginnings are evidence of the sort of metaphysical frame that underlies the action. Thus, characters are caught up in the middle of a conversation, or uttering some sort of metaphysical statement, such as "If things are predetermined surely they must manifest themselves." (220), "... I'll tell you who's got it *easy*..." (226), "Oh no, not me! (...) Not *me*, Lord, to whom you hold out your hand." (*ellipsis*: 274), or "You can't control what you make of your life" (293). Other scenes establish the beginning of a new action through different forms of personal introductions or approaches. For example, the opening utterances "The girl broke the lamp" (222), "You want to buy me a drink?" (230)

“Hello” (239), “How are you?” (241), “What are you looking for?” (257) “How’s everything?” (282), are revealing of the kind of multiple social interactions the protagonist is going through, and the demands: “Seven. Go in Seven.” (233), “Put your money up.” (236), “Check it out... check it out...” (238), “I want a room.” (248), “I want a cup of coffee.” (262) are elucidative of how others try to impinge on Edmond or of his dispossessed and nervy or alienated condition.

Mamet’s preference for starting the action *in media res* seems to be the result of his personal realization of how such an approach can succeed in capturing people’s attention, awaken and/or sharpen their curiosity. When asked in an interview with John Lahr about the rules to make things easier for the audience he says “[g]et into the scene late, get out of the scene early” (Kane, 2001: 112), and he goes on to explain that that was how *Glengarry Glen Ross* got started

I was listening to conversations in the next booth, and I thought, My God, there’s nothing more fascinating than the people in the next booth. You start in the middle of the conversation and wonder, What the hell are they talking about? And you listen heavily. So (...) I thought, Well, if it fascinates me, it will probably fascinate them too (*ellipsis*, Kane, 2001: 112).

Verbal interchanges, apart from contextualizing, also propel action, reveal the characters’ feelings and personalities, the nature of the relationships they establish and, although indirectly, their strategies and longer term objectives.

Speech interactions often occur between two characters from the same professional arenas or that share the same working environment. These binary social interactions are often apparently collaborative at the beginning, as characters resort to dissimulated strategies to pursue their self-interested goals. The first part of the conversation between Moss and Aaronow in the first act of *Glengarry Glen Ross* is a clear illustration of that, as Moss subtly tries to gain Aaronow’s sympathy to then implicate him in a plot to break into Mitch and Murray’s real estate office and steal the “leads”.

Sooner or later however, at some point in their verbal interchanges, the protagonists/antagonists end up revealing their real motives and getting involved in a more or less confrontational and unilateral (since self-interested) dialogue. Moss astutely dodges Aaronow’s questions and resorts to ambiguous language in order to prepare the ground for unveiling his scheme; as Aaronow shows reluctance to take part in the plan, Moss finally resorts to blackmail as he makes



him believe that if he doesn't "rob the place", he will be made an accomplice for the simple reason that he had "listened" to him. An even more overt and enduring confrontation is that between Carol and John in *Oleanna*, particularly in the second and third acts, in which their pervasive self-absorption impedes the establishment of clear lines of communication, prompting anger and frustration on the part of both characters and generating what may be seen on the one hand as a series of misconstructions/misinterpretations of each other's words or, on the other, as opportunities to gain an advantage.

The conversational patterns presented above are visible not only in the examples provided, but also in the interactions established between Levene and Williamson, Roma and Lingk, Fox and Gould, Karen and Gould, and the B-Girl, the Whore, the Sharper, the Prisoner and Edmond. Sometimes, one of these two different phases in the conversational patterns is emphasized; one may witness a longer verbal interchange throughout the collaborative phase or a verbal interchange that moves straight to the confrontational phase – such as happens in "The Subway" scene in *Edmond*.

The characters' usual conversational strategy is less present in *Lakeboat*, where dialogue is more often collaborative than not; here the characters are not so much dependent on each other for a self-interested reason but solely to attain a common goal, which is to create bonds, make friends, be confidants, and comrades in a both external and internal world – although one may find the patterns in the stories they tell.

It is through the context and characters' more or less collaborative/confrontational interactions, more or less tentative or assertive speech, longer or shorter invective, contradictory or congruent attitudes, unpredictable, predictable or inevitable responses that one acknowledges the strength of their motivations and their character. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, for example, despite Roma and Levene's long-time relationship as protégé and mentor, and



apparently supportive attitude, they end up by revealing a symbiosis based upon self-interest and hypocrisy in the face of a business setting that leaves them no alternative, since the survival motto in the community they are part of is “con or be conned”. Levene supports Roma and teams up with him by performing the skill (in a phony business deal) when Lingk arrives to ask for the annulment of the contract; however, Levene had already covertly stolen that same contract. On his side, Roma supports and cajoles Levene while the latter describes his “sit” with the Nyborgs; however, Roma attempts to take Levene over by the end of the play when he assertively tells Williamson “I GET HIS ACTION”, “My stuff is mine, his stuff is ours. I’m taking half of his commissions – now *you* work it out” (107).

Although the plots are delineated through dialogue (human interrelationships) the latter reveals greater prominence than the former as the plots are relatively straightforward and sometimes inconclusive. In *Lakeboat*, although there seems to be no plot, one never gets to know what has really happened to Guigliani, the night cook; in *Edmond*, although we get to know the tragic end of the protagonist, the many moral and metaphysical questions that are raised throughout the play are left unanswered; in *Speed-The-Plow*, one never gets to know whether Gould and Fox got Ross’s “approval” to “greenlight” the film – as the plot ends almost at the same point it started; in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, we get to know who has stolen the leads, but we don’t get to know who will be fired or who will be the best “closer” and first on “the board” – again, the play ends more or less at the same point it started, as life goes on despite Levene’s doom; and in *Oleanna*, three single meetings in John’s office with a student are apparently enough to have destroyed his professional career.

It seems then that the playwright’s aim is not to present a conclusive meaningful framing plot, but to depict a situation/context and use it to demonstrate how it is liable to trigger certain human reactions/responses. For example, a competitive business setting is prone to lead to petty criminality, a craving for fame and greed are prone to lead to hypocrisy and self-interested relationships, hindrances to human aspirations to success and power may lead to anger, revenge or even violence, an isolated environment can lead people to search for connections, but it can also lead to monotony and nostalgia, an aggressive and

cold-hearted environment can change and shape people's behaviour.

These general cause-effect reactions are the echo of the patterns created at a more particular level by the different speech interactions illustrated. Throughout characters' interrelationships, utterances prompt reactions/responses that reveal how characters influence and are influenced by what they say and what they are told. For example, Glenna might not have been killed if it wasn't for her refusal to acquiesce and repeat the phrase "I am a waitress", Lingk might not have innocently signed the contract if it wasn't for Roma's assertive, astute, intimidating and intimate rhetoric, Carol might not have taken revenge on John if she hadn't found out so much about his personal ideas and intimate affairs throughout eavesdropping, their speech interchanges or his confessional moments, and Fox might not have self-interestedly persuaded Gould into opting for the "buddy film" in detriment of Karen's "artsy" film if it wasn't for the question Gould ended up asking Karen, despite his certainty that it wouldn't change his mind,: "Would you [have] gone to bed with me, [if] I didn't do your book?" (77), to which she truthfully, and contradicting her former attitude, answered "No".

The condition, nature and motivation of the contemporary American human being, with all its virtues, flaws and contradictions is therefore illustrated by the playwright through the verbal reconstruction of these cause-effect reactions. The audience, whose attention has been intentionally captured, may ultimately search for some enlightenment by pondering upon the nature of those same cause-effect reactions and the questions they raise. Then, as Mamet states in an interview with Geoffrey Norman<sup>4</sup> and John Rezek<sup>5</sup>, maybe his job as a dramatist is accomplished:

My job is to show human interactions in such a way that the synthesis an audience takes away will perhaps lead to a greater humanity, a greater understanding of human motives. I don't know how successful I am at it, but that absolutely is my job (Kane, 2001: 132).

### **3.2. Invective and Profanity**

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<sup>4</sup> a reporter living in Vermont.

<sup>5</sup> Playboy Magazine Assistant Managing Editor.

*"I've always been fascinated by the picaresque. That's part of the Chicago tradition: to love our gangsters and con men, the bunko artists and so forth" (Kane, 2001: 113).*

*David Mamet*

According to Mamet, drama is the confrontation between two people who want something different, something from each other, who can be both protagonists and antagonists and who will do anything to be successful in their quest (Kane, 2001: 65, 75, 221). Confrontation and antagonism entails opposition, resentment, hostility and, in the last instance, aggression, which naturally may translate into coarse language or even physical violence when in an urban and particularly male working class context such as that often selected by the author.

Invective and profanity used to be an unusual form of literary expression, since most literature has been intended for literate and educated people whose sentiments were supposed to be expressed in a more formal and polite linguistic register. In addition, the theatre, as a public performance art, has been exposed more than any other literary form to the impositions of censorship and "polite" tastes and conventions. Mamet's experience and interest in the life of the lower and middle classes made him wish to take literature to other social sectors. To capture that audience he needed to establish a rapport between people's daily lives and what they saw and heard on stage. Therefore, the language he uses in his plays is the restatement of his idea of how people talk in the streets, on the bus or in the elevator (Kane, 2001: 108).

The language spoken in the streets, which is that of the masses, is naturally informal, sparse, objective, grammatically imprecise and, particularly within lower or middle class male social spheres, peppered with expletives. By evoking the coarse language of the streets without any trimmings or beautification of its unpleasant realities, without censorship or apology, Mamet is recreating a straightforwardness and spontaneity not found in polite conversation and offering a grittier representation of the world.

The vocabulary people of certain social spheres usually resort to is that which is accepted, understood and common to their peers, that which helps them feel part of the group and bound to that community. In the plays, profanity and invective are part of that vocabulary and thus constitute a pragmatic means of

depicting characters' release of feelings, anxieties and frustrations and of defining the environment they inhabit; which is usually oppressing, tough and competitive.

The recourse to harsh and abusive language and invective as an integrating part of a group's sociolect generates the kind of linguistic relationships which propitiate and foment equally offensive and retaliating actions, which become the norm in that group, although they break with more widely accepted social norms. Therefore, hypocrisy, swindling, petty criminality, physical aggression, or even crime, are part of the tense characters' *modus vivendi*.

In the plays, the use of invective or profanity usually aims to achieve certain effects and generate different meanings according to specific contexts and the way they are inflected. In *Glengarry Glen Ross* one bears witness to what is probably the most profane of David Mamet's plays. The rules of the newly defined "sales' contest" prompt a ferocious competition in an all-male working class business setting in which the salesmen's ultimate goal is to succeed no matter what. Therefore, adrenaline-production is often at its highest levels and the characters' energy is directed to swindling everyone around them: boss, colleague or client. Profanity in this play is part of the necessary language of the quest for empowerment and material well-being. It is used to compete (attack and defend) or cajole and establish a sense of comradeship.

Although the film version of *Glengarry Glen Ross* has 193 swear words, the play accounts for 199. It is Moss who, in the film, reveals the highest obscenity count (67), followed by Roma (59) and Levene (48), whereas in the play it is Levene who utters far more expletives (79) than any other character. Therefore, the film version depicts a less assertive and aggressive Levene than the one the text aims to depict, maybe to better emphasize his age and decrepitude, his deteriorating skills, his collapsing assertiveness and fading energy. On the other hand, Roma and Moss utter approximately the same number of expletives as they do in the play, probably to allow their youth, vigour, and lively assertiveness to contrast with Levene's exhaustion and lack of virility.



Levene finds himself in a very vulnerable situation. Apart from being the oldest salesman in the office and having visibly become less skilled as he got older, he unveils some family concerns, and he desperately needs to sell real estate and make money not to be fired. The company has just introduced a new sales policy in which the “hot leads are assigned according to the board” (21); and, as Levene is not in one of the two top positions, this virtually means he will get the “dreck”, won’t be able to “close” and will lose his job. In the face of a context in which “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”, Levene’s ineluctable doom brings to mind the situation and final resolution of the Parable of the Talents from the Bible, in which the two servants who were given ten and five talents could each multiply them and be rewarded whereas the servant who was given a single talent and was not capable of generating revenue has equally lost his talent and his job to his more ambitious peers.

Levene’s distressing realization of his most disadvantageous current situation makes him resort to densely profane phrases, some of them also uttered in the film version, like “...then what is this ‘you say’ shit” (17), “...I got to eat. Shit, Williamson, shit” (17), “Bullshit. John. *Bullshit*” (17), “What I’m saying is it’s fucked” (19), “we’re here to fucking *sell*. *Fuck* marshaling the leads. What the fuck talk is that? What the fuck talk is that?” (19), “That’s fucked. That’s fucked. You don’t look at the fucking *percentage*” (21), which show his despair, strong indignation and anger against the new and unfair company policy, whose rules Williamson coldly insists on enforcing. A mixture of despair and the need to pass on the message that he has got the drive to succeed is also evident when he pleads with Williamson for help “I got to get on the fucking board. (...) I’m going to get up on that fucking board” (*ellipsis*: 22). Swear words, when extravagantly stressed by a high-pitched or whispering voice, as Levene does in the film version after “closing” the Nyborgs, also help translate his over-excitement or magnify the pleasure of the moment: “Pick up the fuckin’ chalk”, “It was so fucking great”, “It was so fucking solemn”, “Ah, fuck! Send me out! Give me leads!” When he experiences some form of success, he regains his confidence and ventures into invective directed against his latest hindrance, Williamson, who has just insinuated his sale wouldn’t “stick”: “Hey, *fuck* you. (...) A man’s his job and you’re *fucked* at yours” (*ellipsis*:

75) and “Has this cocksucker ever been...” (76), “Fuck *you*. That’s my message to you. Fuck you and kiss my ass” (77). In the first tirade directed at Moss, Levene reveals his ambivalence, or maybe duplicity. On the one hand he seems to have assimilated the dehumanizing Reaganomics ideology of the time that a man’s life is his job, and uses it to imply that he is competent and worthy – a real man - and Moss is worthless and deprived of manliness for being “fucked” at it; on the other hand he conveys concern about his family at different moments of the play. This means that in practice this ideology doesn’t apply to him and, in a more general sense, proves the belief that people’s lives are naturally a lot more than just their jobs. Levene’s statement that “a man’s his job” is just an example of the inculcated social ideologies that Mamet wants to make audiences reflect upon: To what extent is it natural, human or fair to create an environment in which a man is not regarded as such for allowing his private life to interfere with his public life? Is it right to have money and success as one’s sole concern in life? Isn’t life a lot more than just that? These are the kinds of questions raised in Mamet’s plays that were mentioned earlier on page 47, in 3.1. *Dialogue and Scene Setting/Building*.

Expletives are more often used to offend and attack when the salesmen are indignant, angry, desperate, feel humiliated or over-excited and when they need to “close” and fail to do so. The latter is Roma’s situation by the end of the second act. He directs his entire wrath at Williamson, who has just ruined his deal with Link, in an invective of scatological attributes and contemptible metaphors that question his virility, and which aims to humiliate Williamson and eject him from the manly group of the salesmen: “You stupid fucking cunt. You, Williamson ... I’m talking to *you*, shithead. (...) You fucking *shit*. (...) You stupid fucking *cunt*. You *idiot*. Whoever told you you could work with *men*? (*ellipsis*: 95,96), and the invective goes on with expressions like “You fairy”, “You company man” or “fucking child”. While endowing Williamson with the characteristics of a woman, Roma succeeds in establishing an implicit striking comparison between him (and the other salesmen) and his interlocutor, establishing by contrast a mood of masculinity, virility and toughness favourable to the salesmen and unfavourable to Williamson. Roma uses a wider range of expletives than any other salesmen, which along with his elocution, rhetoric and improvisational skills shows why he is

the most resourceful speaker of the group. In a previous altercation with Moss “Fuck you, Dave, (...) Your *pal* closes, all that comes out of your mouth is *bile*, how fucked *up* you are...” (*ellipsis*: 70,71), he had already proved himself to be one of the most astute and calculating salesmen, as he tried to cast out from the group his most direct rival. His growing despair and anger are also verbally materialised in a successive burst of “fucks” when he finds out about the robbery and can’t get a satisfying explanation from Williamson about what has happened to his contract with Ling: “Oh, fuck. Fuck. (*He starts kicking the desk.*) FUCK FUCK FUCK! WILLIAMSON!!! WILLIAMSON!!! (*Goes to the door Williamson went into, tries the door; it’s locked.*) OPEN THE FUCKING... WILLIAMSON... (53). Here, as profanity and invective accompany violence, he shows once more his self-assurance, aggressiveness and vitality.



Moss’s recourse to profanity or invective accentuates his impatience and anger after being interrogated by the police: “Fuckin’ asshole” (65), “Fuck you, Ricky” (66), and his strained condition, self-centeredness and envy when he acknowledges Levene’s sale of eight units to the Nyborgs: “Fuck you” (66), “Fuck the Machine” [Levene’s nickname] (66), “I don’t want to hear your fucking war stories...” (67). It also stresses the mood of competitiveness, his feelings of humiliation, offense, envy and contempt in the invectives directed at Roma, who had just triumphantly responded to his repeated challenge “*Fuck* is that supposed to mean?” (69), by reminding him that he had not “closed a good one in a month” (69): “Bring that shit up” (70), “You’re *fucked*, Rick” (70), “I get this *shit* thrown in my face by you, you genuine shit, because you’re top name on the board...” (70), “Fuck you, you got the memory of a fuckin’ fly” (71); and lastly, it helps emphasize his wild rage in the words he directs to all his workmates “And fuck you. Fuck the *lot* of you. Fuck you all” (71).





Whereas invective inherently assumes an offensive meaning, and informs the audience of the nature and progress of the characters' relationships, profanity in itself, although imbued with a negative meaning, can also assume a phatic function. In this case, it isn't articulated to convey any particular information important to move the action forward but simply used to add emphasis to a word or idea, as in "You fucking *build* it!", "you can't fucking turn around" (36), "That's none of your fucking business..." (45).

Profanity is also often used to fill a syntactic position. When used to do so, swear words mostly replace adjectives to give a negative connotation to things or people, as in Levene's utterance: "They're fucking Polacks, John" (21), or Moss's expressions: "Fuckin' Indians" (29), "fuckin' thing" (30), "fucking *toaster*..."(35), "The fucking leads" (43), "The fucking tight ass company" (43), "Those fuckin' *deadbeats*..." (67), "Fucking war stories" (67). They can also be used to replace nouns metaphorically and confer on them a strong negative connotation of mockery or contempt, as in Levene's words: "I closed the cocksucker." (63), "convert the motherfucker ..." (72), "Has this cocksucker ever been..." (76). Swear words can even replace adjectives and nouns simultaneously, as in Roma's invective: "You fucking *shit*" (96), "You stupid fucking *cunt*" (96), which escalates the aggression. At other times profanities replace verbs, as in Levene's remarks: "I'm not going to fuck with you" (24) – to betray you, "Two guys get fucked" (36) – fired, or Roma's: "I don't give a shit" (55) - I don't care, whose meanings are easily inferred by the context. Profanities can also replace auxiliary verbs and interrogative adverbials as in Levene's remark: "The fuck *you* care" (40) – What do you care, as in Roma's utterances: "Fuck insured"(55) – I don't care about that, "Fuck that shit, George"(57) – Don't worry about that, "Fuck you care...?" (68) – What do you care...? or as in Moss's vituperation: "Fuck is that supposed to mean?" (69) – What is that supposed to mean? This use of profanity confers on language not only a certain vigour, pace and pattern, but it also mirrors the characters' linguistic sparsity and pragmatism.

It is noteworthy that the salesmen don't swear while putting on their acts during their sales "pitches". In effect, they are operating outside their social sphere and their goal is not to antagonise, but to hypocritically "side with" and generate a

feeling of sympathy and trust so as to persuade/manipulate the client (“mark”) into buying the worthless plots on sale. The film version is a lot more prolific in depicting the salesmen’s “pitches” than the play. In the former the salesmen are often seen on the telephone embodying different and more powerful characters, making up stories and lying about their intentions in an attempt to lure the “marks” into an appointment. Their voices are more ingratiating than usual; they use more formal and polite language. In Levene’s unsuccessful “sit” with Mr Spannel, the conspicuous strategy of attempting to gain his confidence by creating a familiar and intimate mood with words like “I see you’re interested in fishing. I’ve fished myself... many years”, “Your name is Larry. Mind if I call you Larry?” or “Just call me Shelly. I have never been afraid of familiarity” is clear and proves to be ineffective. Mr Spannel is quick to understand Levene’s intentions and euphemisms and ends up putting him out. Apart from using a more conventional approach, and an unusual politeness that sounds artificial, he visits the client at his house in an attitude of subservience and self-interest.

Levene’s “sit” differs from Roma’s in a number of ways. On his side, Roma is portrayed as using a less predictable, more creative, assertive and energetic approach with his clients. He uses his oratory and rhetoric skills to talk about life in general in a very straight and self-assured way, how one should take life as it comes and seize every opportunity without regret, to then, when one least expects it and as if by chance, introduce business. The trap is set, sympathy and intimacy have been subtly established and the unguarded client is taken by surprise and is led to sign the contract on the spur of the moment. Besides this, Roma is seen “acting” in a neutral field, a public bar, from which no subservient attitude can be inferred. Despite the fact that Roma also ends up failing, his “performances” reveal that he is a more virile, skilled and successful salesman than Levene.

Although one may find invective and profanity in the five plays of the author, profanity is almost nonexistent in *Oleanna* because, conventionally, in a college context, conversations between professors and students are supposed to be formal and based on higher language standards.

In *Oleanna* invective consists mainly of bursts of anger or despair, and aggressive accusatory assertiveness, which is achieved not through the recourse

to expletives, but through a raised or high-pitched voice, or a desperate, indignant, angry or censoring tone used to attack some particular words, phrases, or ideas that in context are taken as derogatory. An accusatory and defensive positioning, which shifts as Carol and John's conversation proceeds, is present in the language of both characters. At first, John takes on the "accusatory" role while trying to enforce the academia "*criteria* for judging progress in the class" (9), and Carol the "defensive" role while pleading understanding and help. In the second and third acts Carol assumes an accusatory and censoring tone and John a more impatient, angry, and indignant one. John mainly keeps trying to control his temper and defend himself from Carol's formal accusations to the Tenure Committee. By the middle of the third act, John's voice pitch intensifies and invective becomes more overt when Carol demands that his book be banned from the list that includes it "as a representative example of the university" (75) for being considered "questionable" and "dangerous" by her Group. This leads John to lose control, to break the inculcated conventional social norm of politeness and instinctively to utter the first swear word directly addressed to her "Get the fuck out of my office" (75). At almost the end of the play John is unexpectedly informed that Carol has also accused him of "attempted rape" and "battery", which leaves him overwhelmed and unable to reason. At Carol's unexpected politically correct and intrusive statement "...and don't call your wife 'baby'", John loses complete control and, in a helpless burst of anger, resorts to physical violence. This cathartic moment that seems, from his facial expression, to have allowed him a clearer insight of the events, as his attitude also lends truth to Carol's previous accusations, is accompanied by the verbal invective "You little *cunt*...", which contains the fourth and last profanity in the whole play. This is John reverting to primitive instinct and a more honest frame of mind, without the politeness, sophistication or social constraints that have hitherto kept him from resorting more often to profanity and maybe physical aggression. In *Oleanna* swearwords and physical violence are exclusive province of the male figure, they assume a purgative function and constitute John's last redoubt of power in the face of his inability to exert it over Carol any more through the conventional means.

In *Edmond*, invective and profanity mirror the harsh and perverse

environment Edmond is exploring and mark Edmond's change of personality, or metamorphosis. They have here a stronger effect than in any of the other plays, as they most often go together and assume a physical dimension that translates into criminal violence. In effect, invective and profanity are intimately associated with the underworld, the sex industry, gambling, and petty and serious criminality. As Edmond travels the streets of New York he meets different characters that share similar speech styles, as they resort to profanity both as part of their sociolect and in invective. The latter occurs when operating in intimidatory, dangerous or conflict situations that may place their lives at risk, as the Sharper does in his hostile black street-argot "You ain't goin' see no motherfuckin' cards, man, we playin' a *game* here. ..." (247), or the Pimp in his menacing physical invective "Now give me all you' money mothafucka! *Now!*" (260).

As soon as Edmond leaves home, he meets a man of enigmatic identity in a bar who echoes the Mephistopheles of older narrative traditions. This man has a wicked vision of the world; he believes people are bred to do the things that they do and therefore, if they do wrong, they are not to be blamed for it. In addition, he ironically advises Edmond to get away from the pressure through the same means that place people in the "pressured" situation they want to escape from: "pussy", "power", "money", "adventure", "self-destruction" (227). Henceforth, Edmond, in his headstrong desire to explore earthly carnal pleasures, begins a Faustian journey into the underworld, which parallels a descent into hell. Whereas those who inhabit New York's underworld seem to be adapted to the prevailing rules and have developed their own survival stratagems, Edmond, as an outsider who does not know the rules of the place, insists on his own rules and ends up beaten and confused; his integration in this world proving both physically and mentally disruptive. In every relationship he establishes, he finds indifference, distrust or hostility. His perplexity, anger and fear increase as encounter succeeds encounter; in his third meeting he already begins to lose his temper and the first "fuck" comes out of his mouth: "Then what the fuck am I giving you ten bucks for?" (235). By the end of his eighth meeting, still unaware of the male crooks' endemic violence, Edmond insistently challenges the Sharper to show him the cards. The petty criminal retaliates both verbally "...*Here* is the motherfuckin' cards...." (247) and

by hitting him repeatedly until he falls on the ground.

At the Hotel, Edmond's invective, although empty of profanities, expresses eloquently his resentment and anger against the Clerk's indifference and distrust. Again, his reaction reflects his ignorance of the rules of the place, where moneylessness is the only unforgivable crime. In the subway scene, which in the play takes place before the two killings Edmond perpetrates, contrary to what happens in the film version, Edmond experiences distrust and hostility again. His sudden invective, first addressed to the woman and then to everyone around him, is densely punctuated with profanity, heavily imbued with sexual connotation: "I want to lick your pussy'?", "You *cunt*", "I'd like to slash your fucking *face*... I'd like to slash your motherfucking *face* apart" (255), "Fuck you... fuck you... fuck you... fuck the *lot* of you... fuck you *all*..." (256). This vituperation, which works as a pressure-valve and an alternative to physical aggression, echoes the clashing effect of the two different worlds and adds to the aggravation of his psychopathy.

In his twelfth social interaction (scene 14), in the bleak streets of New York City, Edmond becomes the by now willing victim of robbery. This time he seems to have assimilated the spirit of the place, having prepared himself both physically and verbally, and strikes back in a wild compulsive series of strikes, kicks and swear words of racial, sexual, and scatological content that mirror his deranged condition:

YOU MOTHERFUCKING NIGGER!", You motherfucking *shit*... you *jungle* bunny", "You *coon*, you *cunt*, you *cocksucker*..." (260), "You *fuck*. You *nigger*. You *cunt*... You *shit*... You *shit*... You *shit*... You fucking *nigger*. Don't fuck with *me*, you *coon* (261).

Edmond's uncontrolled and brutal invective is paralleled by his lethal action. Language becomes insignificant by the time he gets to murder; words are spat out irrationally and, along with action, they become purgative. Later, while telling Glenna about the killing, he admits that in that *moment* thirty years of prejudice came out of him and that for the first time he saw that "niggers" were people, too (265).

Edmond's mental condition becomes even clearer in his thirteenth meeting (scene 16). In Glenna's apartment, Edmond is comfortable with swear words; although he reveals some animosity caused by the still remaining adrenaline, his

speech seems naturally permeated with derogatory obscenities. At Glenna's first clear signal of distrust and anxiety, Edmond's mental instability is aggravated. He gets carried away by fear and strain and is unable to reason, to control the situation or himself. The elemental nature of violence becomes visible as he stabs Glenna to death in another purgative moment while repeatedly uttering the emphatic and derogatory profanity "stupid fucking *bitch*" (273). Again, Edmond takes his words and actions as inconsequential and he even seems to hold Glenna responsible for his own action: "*now* look what you've done" (273). As a mentally disturbed man, who by the end of the play proclaims that "[y]ou can't control what you make of your life" (293), he never takes responsibility for his own actions.

In Edmond's masochistic and self-degrading descent into hell it is clear that as the increasingly hostile or dangerous meetings succeed, the purgative profanity and invective in Edmond's discourse also intensifies. Therefore, the intensity of profanity and invective in Edmond's discourse measures the extent of the character's metamorphosis in the face of the more or less belligerent contexts that impinge on him.

When in prison, Edmond becomes polite again and his aggressiveness vanishes. There, he is sodomised by his black cellmate, which seems to have some kind of spiritual cleansing effect on him, or else leads to resignation. While his cellmate goes on naturally resorting to swear words to express himself, as they are an entrenched characteristic of his black male speech, Edmond has acquiesced to the female condition of his new relationship; his language is now emasculated, as it is clean of profanity or invective. Edmond has changed his male identity and has ironically turned into what he has once shown prejudice against: a faggot (266). Unable to dominate women successfully, former homophobe Edmond seems to have eventually found some comfort, peace, safety and stability in allowing himself to be dominated by a male figure and in adapting himself to the role of the female.

The patterns followed by David Mamet's characters in their use of invective and profanity are naturally familiar to all of us. They can easily be witnessed in our own urban daily lives, in the city streets or on the television. Therefore, they help

Mamet's intentions of reconstructing the prevalent pressure, hostility, violence, decadence and predatory nature of life in the American cities, such as he interprets it. Hence his observation that "[w]e are frightened of each other in the cities, at least in American cities" (Kane, 2001: 156).

### 3.3. Grammar and Syntax

"My point is that my dialogue is not realism. It's a poetic restatement of my idea of how people talk" (Kane, 2001: 108).

David Mamet

In Mamet's plays the characters' excitement, anxiety or strain is visible in the incorrect grammar and unconventional and inconsistent syntax they sometimes produce. Their ungrammatical dialogue also reflects their social background and pragmatism.

The characters' colloquial language is mainly made up of short sentences in which verbs, nouns and pronouns stand out. The predominance of verbs doesn't often translate the action performed onstage. Instead, they refer mainly to the actions already performed offstage, to be done in the future, or else, those carried out by the people whose stories the actors tell. In spite of the actors' expressiveness in their roles, their action onstage doesn't exude dynamism. Verbs operate mainly in the realm of conversation, which makes it more vivid than the action itself. Although the supremacy of conversational vividness over dynamic action is true of most of Mamet's plays, *Lakeboat*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Speed-The-Plow* and *Oleanna* are the best examples of this and *Edmond* the worst, due to its episodic and journeying nature.

The frequent use of the pronouns "I", "me", "mine" and "you" reveals the characters' self-absorption and their positioning in relation to the other members of the group. This is clearly visible in the altercations between Moss and Roma or in Levene's self-aggrandizing and romanticized description of his "sit" with the Nyborgs. The pronoun "we" is seldom used and therefore sounds awkward when uttered; it sounds bogus and creates a false sense of camaraderie. In *Speed-the-*

*Plow*, Fox sees in its use a synonym for “alliance” and “commitment”, although based on his self-interested desire to climb the socio-economic ladder. So, when Karen uses the pronoun “we” in “Bob, we have an opportunity...”(78), Fox’s reply “‘We’? ‘We’...? I know who *he* is, who are you?” (78) conveys his incisive attempt to defend his menaced personal interests and his feeling of betrayal.

Although repetitions, interruptions, pauses and/or rewordings echo the repetitive nature of authentic speech, Mamet’s deliberate overuse of these rhetoric figures renders the discourse idiosyncratic and prone to enhance the intended effect. Sometimes enthusiasm, strain, despair, inarticulacy, the search for time to organise ideas, or even an effort to manipulate the interlocutor, are conveyed through the repetition of a word or a phrase. Some of these psychological states, mental conditions or efforts are visible in utterances such as Levene’s, when he tries to persuade Williamson to assign him some “hot” leads: “No. John. No. Let’s wait, let’s back up here, I did ... will you please? Wait a second. Please. I didn’t blow them. No. I didn’t blow them. No. One kicked out, one closed...” (16). Levene’s excitement while talking with Roma is also achieved through the same linguistic strategy: “I *did* it. I *did* it. Like in the *old* days, Ricky. Like I was taught...Like, like, like I *used* to do...I did it” (Mamet,1984: 73).

The above rhetorical device is often used in invective or to accompany physical violence. Here it helps to express the elemental need to release the strain. Such is the case when, for example, uncontrolled Edmond stabs Glenna to death: “Are you *insane*? Are you *insane*, you fucking *idiot*?... You stupid fucking *bitch*... You stupid fucking ...” (273). At other times the characters also repeat or redefine words or phrases just to kill time and make conversation, as in *Lakeboat*:

Joe: Hit the bridge before then.

Dale: Yeah.

Joe: Hit it in about half an hour.

Dale: Yeah.

Joe: Hit it about six” (186).

The unfinished sentences with sudden changes of subject that some characters produce also help render their speech natural and establish a rapport with the audience, as it reflects their natural stream of consciousness and requires people’s close attention to follow the character’s line of thought. This can be



witnessed, for example, in Levene's exchange with Williamson, after his deal with the Nyborgs, when he vaguely alludes to his innermost concern, his daughter: "And, and, and, I *did* it. And I put a kid through *school*. She... and... Cold *calling*, fella. Door to door. But you don't know. You don't know" (77). It is to note here that, as stated on page 51, in 3.2. *Invective and Profanity*, Levene gives away important information about his private life. He reveals his innermost concerns, his life beyond his job, his humanity and his hidden fragility.

At other times, clauses, ideas or words are constantly left unfinished to be completed by the other interlocutor in a cooperative dialogue that sometimes is astutely steered to serve somebody's purposes. Moss's conversation with Aaronow about stealing the "leads" is an example of that.

As people tend to be linguistically pragmatic in informal contexts, they have a propensity to abbreviate words and phrases by resorting to ellipsis, contractions, apocope or syncopation. Moreover, the lower the social class a person belongs to, that is, the more illiterate or uneducated, the more ungrammatical his/her language tends to be. This is the case in Mamet's plays. Edmond's grammar and syntax contrast with that used by characters of lower social class such as the Prisoner or the Pimp, who use black street argot. While Edmond's linguistic structures are normally correct, the Pimp's, for example, are often elliptical, as auxiliary verbs are omitted and apocope and contractions can be registered:

Pimp: You give it to me *now*, you unnerstan'? Huh? (*Pause.*) Thass the *transaction*. (*Pause.*) You see? Unless you were a *cop*. (*Pause.*) You give me the *money*, and then thass *entrapment*. (*Pause.*) You understand?" (Mamet, 1987 a.: 259).

However, the lower-middle or working classes, in a ferocious competitive informal setting, are also prone to resorting to a simplified, prosaic kind of language as a reflection of strong tension and their innate defensive, egotistical or aggressive instincts which deny them the necessary calm to attend to formal inculcated linguistic aspects. Although not so often, grammatical and syntactical incorrections can also be found in plays like *Speed-The-Plow* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*, as they have become part, for the reasons presented above, of the characters' sociolect. For example, Moss's worried fast-paced language results in sentences with formal linguistic anomalies like: "How am I gonna get on the board

tryn' to sell a doctor?", where we find the expression "going to" contracted into a single word, an apocope in "trying", and the omission of the letters in the beginning of "them", or the ellipsis of the auxiliary verb and anomalous mixed up verb tenses in sentences like "you get those names come up, you ever get 'em, 'Patel'?" (Mamet, 1984: 29). These are just some examples of the kinds of linguistic structure found in Mamet's language.

*Oleanna*, which is set in a formal and literate context, seems to have the syntactically most fractured language of all the five plays. The characters often produce grammatically correct but syntactically very fragmented language. Unfinished utterances help reflect Carol's apparent inarticulacy, confusion and lack of self-confidence at the beginning of the play. John's persistent interruptions of Carol's words help establish his authority as a professor, reveal some anxiety resulting from the distraction of the persistent telephone calls and expose his mental lack of predisposition to listen to what she has to say. Carol's too sudden and unexpected assertive interruptions of John's words reflect some instability and unpredictability on her part at first; later they reflect an unexpected new articulacy and a shift in authority. Carol and John's frequent pauses help convey their need for time to think or organise the discourse.

The interruptions that expose Carol and John's self-centeredness, and inability, or lack of predisposition, to listen and try to understand each other's points of view, open space for misapprehensions and facilitate the production of an incoherent discourse. Repetitions can result from the constant attempts to finish just interrupted utterances, from the attempt to finish the interlocutor's idea according one's own frame of mind, or from an attempt to manipulate language to meet one's self-interested goals.

In a study about repetition in conversation among different cultures, Tannen concludes that some cultures, notably East European Jewish-Americans, value conversation, and a lot of syntactic repetition has been observed among them (Tannen, 1996: 79). Bearing in mind that East European Jewish cultures have historically been very prominent in Poland, that many Polish Jews have settled in the Chicago area, that Mamet is an American Jew of Polish origin, and that he recognizes the influence of his family in his linguistic style, syntactic repetition in

his plays can be the result of an East European Jewish cultural influence. Mamet may be simply making use of the linguistic traits and tropes of his upbringing and community to achieve his intended dramatic effects.

### 3.4. Rhythm, Pace and Prosody

*“The language in my plays is not realistic but poetic. The words sometimes have a musical quality to them. It’s language that is tailor-made for the stage. People don’t always talk the way my characters do in real life, although they may use some of the same words” (Kane, 2001: 49).*

David Mamet

Mamet’s dialogue is tailored to sound like the perception he has of it, as spoken by the people in his local streets. Apart from providing a surface realism, Mamet’s language is also “poetic and accurate in its everyday rhythms to the degree that it can be called ‘homely poetry’” (Demastes, 1988: 78). In Mamet’s work words must serve two purposes with different priorities; firstly rhythm and pace, and secondly meaning – the latter being conveyed by both verbal and non-verbal devices. In a radio interview<sup>6</sup> with Christopher Bigsby, Mamet said “I’m trying to write dramatic poetry... I’m trying to capture primarily through the rhythm and secondarily through the connotation of the word the intention of the character. So, when that is successful, what one ends up with is a play in free verse” (Dean, 1990: 17).

For A. R. Gurney, Jr, in *Broadway Talks*, Mamet’s use of language in his plays resembles an “improvised, jazzy, or rocky kind of language” since he “has had television and the streets and the movies and the rock music influence them” (Sponberg, 1991: 193). In effect, Mamet moulds dialogue with phoneme and phrase, syllable and sentence; he carefully chooses his words and often rearranges the syllables of a word so that it fits in with his rhythms and keeps the cadence. As a result, Mamet’s words and phrases are sometimes repeated, elliptical, compressed, syncopated or truncated. He explicitly values sound above

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<sup>6</sup> *Kaleidoscope*, Radio 4, (B.B.C. radio) 19 April 1985.

sense by experimenting with rhyme, chiming, resonance, onomatopoeia and alliteration. Moreover, the habitual clipped dialogues resulting from this language artistry are themselves intended devices that add to the rhythm, pace and tension one can find in Mamet's plays.

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the rhythm of the conversation between the salesmen and their clients is often fast and vivid echoing resolution and exuding self-confidence. Theirs is a self-consciously crafted dialogue with soft sounding tones, harmonious rhythms and no pauses, intended to capture attention, sympathy, and impress, as in Levene's interaction with Mr Spannel, or in those on the telephone with clients, as presented in the film version of the play. When talking with their peers or Williamson, who know the business well, the salesmen's emotions know no constraints; rhythm, pace and voice pitch follow more varied patterns. Sometimes, the frequent use and repetition of very short words and phrases increase musicality and cadence. These features are particularly present in the interactions between Williamson and Levene in Act One and Two, Aaronow and Moss in Act One, or Roma, Moss and Levene in Act Two.

Throughout Levene and Williamson's conversation, rhythm, pace and voice pitch follow a recurrent pattern. When Levene is in a pleading attitude, rhythm, pace and intonation are softer, slower and lower, when he is in a less defensive position, rhythm, pace and voice pitch become stronger, faster and higher, until he regains control over his sounding voice and the pattern of these sonorities repeat themselves again. Rhythm, pace and prosody translate not only the characters' despair or attempt to gain control, but also their empowerment. That is why, in his turn, as evidenced in Kevin Spacey's screen performance, Williamson's voice pitch and pace are steady and unaltered throughout the conversation.

Sometimes, in their determination, characters such as Roma and Moss emphasise words in sentences, sometimes the whole sentence, creating a clear resonance and strong sound effect that reinforces their tenacity. At other times, the thundering reverberation of their vocal cords echo their anger or tempestuousness and, in the altercation between Roma and Moss, a reflection of their ferocious competitiveness.

The frequent alternate repetition of words, partial or even whole lines, which

Mamet must have derived in part from his friend and mentor Harold Pinter, sometimes with slight changes or additions, contribute to the reverberation, chime, and rhyme of the dialogue, which often resemble the sonorities of free verse or of improvised jazz. As we can see from Jack Lemmon's recorded performance, Levene's sentence modulation with high and low pitched voice, specific words stressed here and there and alternate slow and fast paced rhythms create a musicality that along with the rhymes created by anaphora provide a sample of what scholars commonly call "Mametian speech". Sometimes equal metric and rhyme (although imperfect, since achieved through anaphora), as in Levene's lines "I said, '10,' you said, 'No.' you said, '20,' I said, 'Fine.'" help provide a closer resemblance to poetry.

Another example of Mamet's prosodic characteristics is Aaronow and Moss's monotonic dialogue:

Aaronow: Yeah. They came in...  
Moss: They fucked it up.  
Aaronow: They did.  
Moss: They killed the goose.  
Aaronow: They did.  
Moss: And now...  
Aaronow: We're stuck with this...  
Moss: Stuck with this fucking shit.  
Aaronow: This shit.  
Moss: It's too...  
Aaronow: It is" (*Mamet*, 1984: 30, 31).

Their often unfinished very short sentences or interrupted attempts to speak help generate anaphora, alternated repetitions, a regular and often alternated iambic dimeter or tetrameter, and a staccato effect, which cohere with the frequent musicality of the plays.

Rhyme, rhythm and prosody generate a meaningful musicality since they establish the tone and mood of the conversation. This musicality is achieved mainly through the recurrent repetition of short and strong words or short phrases that create rhyme and a regular harmony in speech. These rhythmic patterns generate a catchy syncopated speech that makes listening to it even more pleasurable.

### 3.5. Jargon and Demotic Language

*“His fondness for ‘codes’ – such as ‘jargon, the secret symbols, the fraternal hailing signs’ (...) is well known” (ellipsis, Kane, 2001: 264).*

Jargon and demotic language in these plays are representative of some of the most important socio-economic and cultural areas in the USA: the merchant marine, the real estate business, the film industry, higher education and the underworld (the sex industry and crime and racketeering). Mamet’s ability to reconstruct these different arenas and their particular linguistic codes is owed to his own working personal experience in those same particular fields. As a young man, Mamet has worked as a cook on one of the Great Lakes ore boats, and as a real estate salesman selling over the telephone for a dubious real estate company in Chicago. In his maturity, he has worked as a script writer in the Hollywood film business, and as a Professor at Marlboro College and in Goddard College, in Vermont. He is an experienced man who has lived in hotels and has always been a gambler himself, allowing him to write these plays from the inside, from the cognoscenti’s point of view.

Each particular play, or field of business, is endowed with its particular lexicon which confers on it authenticity, but simultaneously renders it hermetic to those external to these domains. This linguistic specificity may pose a problem to the audience at first, as it still has to become acquainted with it, but it also works as a strategy to raise curiosity and awaken interest. Although each sociolect may transport the audience into a little-known world to them, the values it translates is, on the other hand, common and known to all Americans. Mamet resorts to different contexts, defined by particular lexical fields, to approach similar themes: social and moral decadence, ferocious competition, individualism and self-interest triggered by a prevailing social ethos.

#### 3.5.1. The Marine Industry in *Lakeboat*

The language used in *Lakeboat* reflects the working and social lives of the

seamen. Marine jargon and idiom is well understood amongst the experienced members of the crew, which makes them resemble a community that shares the same values, the same practices and whose members know each other well. The language they use is full of slang and grammatical incorrections, which exudes authenticity in spite of the ironic and far-fetched situations its use often involves. Such is the case, for example, in the conversation about the gauges between the Fireman and Dale. Here we get to know that the Fireman's job is to watch two gauges eight hours a day and if something wrong happens, he must do "nothing" but "shut down whichever blows, larboard or starboard (...) call the bridge and (...) call the Chief, in that order" (*ellipsis*: 157). Apparently, the seamen are well aware of the safety procedures and of their own hierarchical obligations.

The play begins with the Pierman initiating Dale into the sailors' social idiom and lifestyle, in a friendly and informal approach, as if he was one of their kind. He tells him the "hearsay" story of Guigliani in his strong accent, very colloquial language, with many grammatical incorrections, much jargon and frequent swear words. We see the university student, the new night cook aboard, attempting to integrate and to be accepted in the marine community by responding in the same sort of blue-collar idiom. Dale uses rhetorical questions and comments such as "Yeah", "Huh", "Oh boy", "Oh Christ", "The bitch", "I suppose you're right", to indicate that he is sympathising and following the Pierman. Besides, he can't add a lot more, for he is an outsider and an ingénue in the business.

The community of sailors, particularly the most experienced ones, take the chance to show, explain or instruct Dale on the sailors' lifestyle, practices aboard the ship and on marine jargon. The First Mate, Skippy, who is apparently worried about the "evacuation drills" and the "Coast Guard" is the first to confront Dale with the marine terminology:

Skippy: What's your number?

Dale: What number, sir?

Skippy: F and E. (*Pause*). F and E boy –

Dale: I don't know what you mean, sir.

Skippy: Fire. Fire and evacuation (147).

Ironically, despite the fact that Dale has been on the ship for just about half an hour and, like Skippy himself, does not know who to check out his fire and

evacuation number with, Skippy doesn't waste the chance to demonstrate his superiority by commenting on Dale's (and somehow his own) ignorance of the matter: "Bunch of children" (148). Collins, the Second Mate, instructs Dale on his chores and work shifts as a cook, the Fireman explains his job in the engine room to Dale and tells him how he occupies his time, Fred warns Dale how they have to endure life aboard without sexual intercourse and also notes that "they say 'fuck' in direct proportion to how bored they are" (159); which testifies to the fact both that swearing/coarse language is pervasive in the seamen's conversations and that life on the boat is boring.

Dale allows himself to be patronised by the experienced sailors, in a collaborative attitude of cajoling camaraderie shared by the group. By the end of the play Dale and the audience are well acquainted with the milieu and enlightened enough to understand the underlying mood of what is supposedly a representative environment for a wider reality – that lived in the late sixties and early seventies on the Great Lakes when, as a result of the closing or reduced production of the steel and iron mines, the need for the transportation of ore had also declined, reducing the activity of ore boats and making seamen's lives aboard seem lethargic and pointless. Apart from some scarce references to the mining business and the prevalent marine jargon that is being taught by the seamen simultaneously to Dale and the audience, the language of the underworld, that of bought sex, criminality, gambling, drinking and guns is also present in the play as conventionally representative of the sailors' unruly shore life, and therefore part of their normal idiom.

### **3.5.2. The Underworld and Sex Industry in *Edmond***

In *Edmond*, there's a clear clash between the language and posture adopted by the inhabitants of the night streets of New York and Edmond - an educated well-positioned middle-class worker, and therefore an outsider in this world. Edmond takes at face value the language that he hears, expecting authenticity and reliability on the part of his interlocutors. This attitude, as I have



previously stated on page 56, in 3.2. *Invective and Profanity*, is the result of his total ignorance of the culture in which he is immersed and which he stubbornly and painfully refuses to understand. Everybody seems to be acquainted with the idiom of this world, except for Edmond, whose naivety and incapacity to ‘read’ the warnings and interpret a whole new culture condemn him to a series of unpleasant surprises as he is constantly conned. Despite Edmond’s difficulty in perceiving and accepting the reality that surrounds him, he undergoes a linguistic and behavioural degradation/assimilation that is clearly visible in the play. However, this linguistic and behavioural metamorphosis is not consistent with his deep-set beliefs and morality, which results in a deeper strain and schizophrenic behaviour. Thus, his former delicate, polite and insecure language becomes more and more assertive, vulgar, arrogant and aggressive, as a result of his evolving as much as frustrating experience in the violent streets of New York. In scene 3, at the bar, he innocently starts talking about his private family life and his feelings with a stranger, thanking him all the time for the man’s pretence of understanding and interest:

EDMOND: “It’s a boring thing to talk about. But that’s what’s on my mind.

MAN: I understand.

EDMOND: You do?

MAN: Yes.

EDMOND: Thank you” (Mamet, 1987a: 228).



The way he addresses the different whores he has contacts with also sounds out of place: “I’m putting myself at your *mercy* ...this is my first time in a place like this. I don’t want to be taken advantage of” (230); and later, with another whore: “I’d like to have intercourse with you” (241). However, further on, after too much deception and frustration, a very different Edmond emerges; he addresses women differently to express his intentions, using “fuck” instead of “intercourse”: “Why do you think? I want to fuck you. It’s as simple as that. What’s your name?” (263), and he lets out a torrent of expletives while dealing with a pimp: “You *fuck*. You *nigger*. You



dumb *cunt* ... You *shit* ... You shit ... (Pause.) You fucking *nigger*. (Pause.) Don't fuck with *me*, you *coon*" (261).

Black street argot and the language of prostitutes are in *Edmond* as we see them in the urban American neo-noir film or the blaxploitation movie, made since the early 1970s. Language is not beautified but coarse, like in the Girl's calculatedly persuasive but straightforward words "Take your dick out". Sex is



here totally devoid of the sensual meaning it can entail, as it doesn't even involve physical contact. The whores' initial politeness is phony, as it conceals ulterior motives and constitutes a scam. Their language, as well as the petty criminals', is literally well understood by everybody, but it hides a second layer of meaning which takes by surprise the unwary and inexperienced person. Behind the language they use lies cynicism, corruption, and the criminal intention of extortion or theft. When Edmond tells the Whore he would like to have intercourse with her, she cynically answers "That sounds very nice. I'd like that, too". This utterance means something different for both interlocutors. Whereas in the whore's mind, it is satisfaction for the money she is going to make out of that job, in Edmond's mind there seems to linger the belief that her intention is not that of making money but of taking pleasure from the act. However, the whore cannot deny her professional code and immediately breaks the transparent beauty of the moment with the sex idiom of the place "For a straight fuck, that would be a hundred fifty". The language of the underworld and sex industry is manifestly the language of tricksters, of inducements and lures, and ready money.

Formally, things such as the breaking of grammatical rules with verbal incorrection and incongruence, syncope, contraction of words, apocope, swear words, particular expressions like "fella", "man", or "my man" and great modulation of voice are characteristics of black street argot, since they are frequently present in the language of the Pimp and the Sharper. In this play, the language deployed is clearly the articulation of an American underworld culture since language used

reconstructs people's working places, translates their *modus vivendi* and mirrors their debased understanding of the world.

### **3.5.3. The Real Estate Business in *Glengarry Glen Ross***

In an interview with John Lahr, while explaining the principles he follows to make things easier for the audience, Mamet explains that people in the real estate business use "extremely arcane language – kind of the canting language" (Kane, 2001: 112). The title of the play is already in the specialised marketing-speak of the profession. It refers to the appealing names of two real estate developments, *Glengarry* and *Glen Ross*, whose names allude to small *faux Scottish* properties tucked away in narrow secluded valleys and that according to Anne Dean were designed to sound "mellifluous", "romantic" and "reliable". The former is the new and apparently exotic property, in swampy Florida, from which the salesmen are selling lots and the latter is Glen Ross Farms, an old and unimportant Arizona desert property that nobody seems interested in selling.

Watching the film for the first time, one encounters a whole new lexicon the meaning of which can only be elicited through context. The epithet of the play, "always be closing", is not only the salesmen's practical sales maxim, but also the first conundrum the audience needs to decode. The salesmen are worried about getting the best "leads", being able to "close", getting their names on the "board", the humiliation they have to endure during "sits" and the difficulty of "cold calls". The real estate jargon is hermetic to the audience and at first only understood by those who know the intricacies of the business well. Demotic language shifts according to context. In the presence of their clients the salesmen avoid the use of expletives and pretend to be polite when, in reality, they are using enticing and alluring verbal strategies to con their "mark". Although they internally long for the authentic collaboration and support of their close community, they tend to resort to their natural profane and swindling language with each other as the external pressures of the enforced business policy constitute a barrier to that possibility. The salesmen often resort to verbal and non-verbal mechanisms of defence like bragging, abuse, conning, and even theft. The language of deceit is prevalent in

this competitive context, as has already been explained in the chapter on “Dialogue and Scene Setting/Building”.

#### **3.5.4. The Film Industry in *Speed-The-Plow***

*“one reason I wrote that is someone told me that (...) you can’t write a parody about Hollywood because it parodies itself. And it’s true. But I wrote it anyway” (ellipsis, Kane, 2001: 221).*

David Mamet

Language in the play is as sprinkled with specific language of the film industry, such as “Art”, “Entertainment”, “greenlight a picture”, “coverage”, “buddy film”, “sequels”, “rentals, tie-in, foreign, air...” as it also describes the attitudes amongst the people in the business and how they relate to each other “You here to promote me?” (5), “I’m going to tell them ‘Go through Channels’. This protects me from them”, or “Life in the movie business is like the, is like the beginning of a new love affair: it’s full of surprises, and you’re constantly getting fucked”, which implies that the film industry is ruled by dishonest and unprincipled people who are always cosying up whoever best serves their self-interest.

Jargon and demotic language in the play may not be difficult to understand by the audience as media issues and gossip, about cinema and TV in particular, have penetrated our general discourse and tend to be one of our favourite topics of conversation. However, the caricature of the less licit meanderings of the film business, achieved through the too obvious way characters exploit their relationship, makes Hollywood resemble a world in which people climb the business hierarchy and survive professionally not because of their real competence or merit, but because of their machinations, their capacity to move and manipulate at the expense of others. Despite Gould’s weaker nature, Fox is there, by his side, to manipulate him and take advantage of him. As Fox admits in the play, and leads Gould himself to admit the same, they are “old whores”, meaning that they are experienced con artists who know the business well and will do whatever it takes to “greenlight” a movie with their names above the title and

make a lot of money or, as they say, “[g]reat big jolly *shitloads* of it” (20).

### 3.5.5. The Academy in *Oleanna*

Academic jargon discourse, like any other jargon, is not especially meant to communicate or express ideas, but to endow people with a sense of belonging and of empowerment. He/she who controls the language controls meaning, who controls meaning makes the rules, who makes the rules wins the game, and winning the game is all that matters in *Oleanna* and everywhere else. Thus, academic jargon in *Oleanna* highlights socio-cultural differences and promotes lack of understanding, misunderstandings, failure, envy and confrontation.

Carol is clearly unable to understand academic language: she doesn’t understand much of John’s pompous vocabulary and is constantly asking him for clarification: “What is a ‘term of art’?” (2), “Virtual warehousing of the young.” (11), “The Curse of Modern Education.” (12), “WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?” (14), “Index?” (24), “When you referred to hazing.” (27), “What is something-other-than-useful?” (28), “Predilection ...” (31), “... the ‘charts.’ The *Concepts*, the...” (35), “I don’t know what a paradigm is.” (45), “The Stoics?” (47), “You will have to explain that word to me.” (63), “Transpire?” (66); she claims to be unable to understand the book he has written “I’m doing what I’m told. I bought your book, I read your... (...) No, no, no. I’m doing what I’m told. It’s *difficult* for me. It’s *difficult*... (...) I don’t... lots of the *language* ... (...) The *language*, the “things” that you say...” (6), and her own notes from class are cryptic to her. On his side, John admits the presence of “some basic missed communi[cation]...” (6) between them, and feels the constant need for defining and redefining his utterances for the sake of making himself understood. But even this Socratic practice irritates and confuses her. This is an encounter between two very different people, from different social and economic backgrounds, consequently separated by language and depending on it to succeed in an academic setting and in life. Carol needs to understand the academic idiom to get a passing grade and “[t]o get on in the world” (12), and John needs to keep his

academic standards to safeguard the remaining “Artificial *Stricture*, of ‘Teacher,’ and ‘Student’”, to get tenure and to acquire a new house.

Despite the fact that Carol and John possess different modes of speech, one can witness a reversal of roles particularly during the second and third acts. Initially, John resorts to authoritative and patronizing language in the face of an inarticulate Carol. In the second act, he already uses a less authoritative, less professorial manner, a more winning (charming), rhetoric language (alluring speech) in the face of the need to convince Carol to retract her accusations against him. Carol’s jealousy and envy of John’s power and success make her firstly conceal her feelings but later try to subvert the roles. Despite John’s more elaborate language, Carol’s more restricted sociolect appears in the second act of the play inexplicably (or maybe due to the influence of her “Group”) improving and developing as she takes control of the dialogue and becomes the one to establish the rules.

Language in *Oleanna* is susceptible to being apprehended differently by Carol and John; they apparently construct different meanings for the same referents. John expresses his left-liberal ideas about education and the Tenure Committee, and exposes his personal life, his problems and his past, unconcerned and unaware of the reasons for Carol’s interest. At first Carol’s intrusiveness seems the result of her naivety and needy condition; an attempt to learn and get acquainted with the milieu. Later on, one realises that John had been too naïve and self-absorbed to foresee the possibility of a different interpretation of his words and actions by someone with a different frame of mind. In her equal self-absorption, Carol’s misapprehension, or wicked misuse, of John’s utterances and attitudes is an excuse to get even. The verbal activity each engages in translates their different interpretations of reality but reveal a common goal: to succeed, to get on. The language of self-extenuating accusation, hypocrisy and concealment also permeates Carol and John’s attempts to communicate and succeed in their quests. This helps blur the borders between truth and falseness and leaves space for the audience to find different interpretations of the same verbal interactions and come across arguments to define Carol and John as both exempt from blame and culprits.

## Chapter 4

### Language and Power

#### 4.1. Symbols of Power

The capitalistic society reconstructed in Mamet's plays is inherently a hierarchical society where the position that the individual occupies on the social ladder depends on many stratifying factors. These factors, which usually take on many forms, are part of the ethos of the American society of the time. Specifically, in Mamet's plays, age, gender, race, nationality, formal education, money, professional status and language are implicitly assumed as societal stratifying factors and determining tools and symbols of power. Power relations are established according to these features in a highly competitive society in which the powerful are usually experienced virile middle-aged American white men who possess effective rhetoric skills and are better positioned be they in the merchant marine, in an academic setting, in the film industry, or in the management of a real estate office. However, on the infernal streets of New York, where chaos prevails, and everything is perverted, the only effective tools are money and control of the rhetoric of the underworld and sex industry. Since Edmond is ignorant of that sociolect, and unable to buy, manipulate or influence a whole community of pimps, whores and con tricksters, he has finally to acquiesce to the self-destructive ways of a corrupted society and become himself perverted as a means to feeling powerful – although eventually he finds himself disempowered again, as we will see further on, in the sub-section about Language and Transformation of Character.

Age generally determines a higher status and more respectability - as in the case of Skippy, the "Oldest First Mate on the Lakes" (132) - or it entails decrepitude and deteriorated skills – as in the case of Levene. Blacks, Polish, Italians, and Indians are also alluded to contemptuously at certain points in the characters' dialogue. In *Lakeboat* Stan reveals some distrust of and disrespect for

Polacks when he is reluctant to trust a Polack to go on watch when he [Stan] is “pissed” (141) or when he addresses Joe as a “[f]ucking no-class Polack” (142). Later, he also belittles Italians by using the term ‘woploving’ - a derogatory term for a person of Italian birth or descent - when he observes about the Fireman’s pro-Italian attitude “What kind of woploving bullshit is that?” (155). In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Moss and Aaronow also refer to Polacks as being “deadbeats” who “hold on to their money” (28) and to Indians, some of the newest immigrants to America, as a “supercilious race” who “like to feel *superior*” but are “*lonely*” and “like to talk to salesmen”, although they “[n]ever bought a fucking thing” (29). Later, still referring to Indians, Roma also observes that he won’t be able to make a living on those “deadbeat wogs”, who wouldn’t sign a contract for a million dollars (62, 63). In *Edmond* the Man in the bar resorts to disparaging remarks about the “niggers” describing them as a race of slackers. He says “Northern races *one* thing, and the southern races something else. And what they want to do is sit beneath the tree and watch the elephant” (266). Before being expunged of his racial and sexual prejudices Edmond himself addresses a black pimp in offensive racial terms when he calls him a “coon”, a “motherfucking nigger”, a “*jungle* bunny”, and a “fucking *nigger*” (260, 261). These derogatory remarks in Mamet’s plays constitute ironic reconstructions of the preconceptions that prevail in some American social spheres.

Formal education also confers power on people not only for the reasoning and oratory capacities it is supposed to endow them with, but also for the possibility it offers of access to a better profession, or to better professional status. In *Oleanna*, John’s professional status and power is conferred by the position he occupies in the academy. He acts in accordance to what he thinks the academy and society expect of him and according to what he believes himself to be entitled to. Thus, he not only prescribes his own book for his course, he seems to believe that he has earned tenure (44) and that he has tried to help Carol (49). Carol, on her side, is younger, a woman, a student who comes from a different socio-economic origin, and thus apprehended as unpossessed of knowledge and in an inferior position to that of the professor. She reiterates her powerless status by repeatedly asking John for clarification, help and understanding. In this academic



setting and idiom, John is legitimated as superior to Carol and therefore tends naturally to exert his power over her, with which Carol concurs in our apprehension.

In *Lakeboat*, Dale is an eighteen-year-old sophomore who is studying English Literature. Joe's acknowledgement of this fact inspires in him some respect, as he excuses himself to Dale for not expressing himself "too well" (190) and as he shows some kind of regret for his past while he wonders about Dale's future and compares it with his own. He also treats Dale with consideration when he kindly states that he is "a bright kid", "a fine, good-looking kid", "a good worker" with a "whole life ahead" of him, and that he "got it made" (191). However, in spite of being a university student aspiring to a higher social status than that of his present workmates, and having established a closer relationship with Joe, maybe promoted by the latter's weaker and more sensitive nature, Dale seems to possess little power in that unfamiliar environment. He is the youngest, the least experienced, an alien and a temporary worker, and that ranks him below all others on the boat.

Dale, as an "Ordinary Seaman", receives orders and is instructed by everybody else. In the boat, the seamen respond to each other according to a certain pre-established order of subordination, as evidenced by the Fireman, who states: "I'm not answerable to you. I'm answerable to the Chief" (156); and while explaining his procedures in case the main gauge goes redline he says: "I call the bridge and I call in the Chief, in that order" (157). Hierarchical and power relations resemble unassailable structures in an environment that is ironically depicted as one where so little happens. Power relations are therefore institutionalized but sometimes flouted in occasional discursive patterns that reveal the characters' elemental need to establish closer connections and sympathy. This fact is often underlined in the film version of *Lakeboat*. In the final interchange between Skipper and Dale, when the former seems reluctant to leave the kitchen without saying goodbye, he finds a way of doing it by paternally teaching Dale how to get marks off stainless steel and by making sure he will remember him for teaching him that trick.

Power, as the ability to influence, manipulate, oppress, disempower,

marginalize or control others, is central in Mamet's plays. This ability is achieved through the different means mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and the speech interactions established between the different interlocutors is the means through which that power is most of the times conveyed or exerted. The language functions expressed, repetitions, the speech marks translated into voice pitch, pauses and interruptions, voice modulation, pace, invective and profanity constitute linguistic recourses to express powerfulness or powerlessness. For example, a demand for help, such as Carol makes in *Oleanna*, implies a submissive condition and therefore her disempowerment; on the other hand, the answer to a required explanation on a certain subject, as in John's case, implies the possession of knowledge, the giving of something one possesses to the other, and therefore the assumption of a superior and more powerful condition. Repetitions or rewordings of somebody else's utterances can be interpreted as a submissive or complying attitude - as in Moss and Aaronow's initial interaction, as they are of a supportive nature. When characters tend to hesitantly repeat their own utterances, they are revealing their lack of self-confidence; their mode of expression can be interpreted as an attempt to overcome this state, which in itself reiterates the character's powerlessness – such seems to be the case in Carol's interchanges with John during the first act, as she seems chronically anxious and unable to express herself. However, repetitions in invective are a defensive mechanism, a last attempt to impose one's meanings, and therefore a sign of a desperate attempt to subdue the interlocutor to one's power instead of the other way round. Interruptions, which are more striking in *Oleanna*, are often non-supportive or antagonistic. In John and Carol's interaction during the first act, John makes use of his power by frequently interrupting Carol so that she listens to what he has to tell her; his attitude aims to impose himself on her and force her to comply. Carol also interrupts John during the first act, although her interruptions aim to express her despair and insecurity, to demand help and understanding; interruptions here are a symbol of submissiveness. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, it appears that who is more profane is either trying to conceal his lack of power (Levene) or to display his virility, his energy and power (Roma and Moss); but because appearance counts for more than substance in the selling business, both

strategies are bluffs, and so are largely empty.

#### 4.2. The Establishment of Power Relations

In a study carried out by the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen on how men and women establish power relations, she claims that her results were similar to those of Barbara Johnstone, another sociolinguist, who concluded that men see power as coming from their own individual capacity to succeed in life, which they regard as a permanent contest and struggle against others, or natural forces. For women the community is their source of power, and therefore life is a struggle against the danger of being cut off from their community. Thus, men tend to tell tall tales about human physical fights and intellectual or verbal contests, and contests with nature, like hunting or fishing. Moreover, when they are not the protagonists, another man is, not a woman (Tannen, 1991: 177,178).

This is true of *Lakeboat*, where men, despite trying to hold together a community, also tell tall tales about their deeds: Fred and Stan's sexual tall tales or Stan's bragging about drinking; and as for Guigliani, he might have been robbed by a woman, but probably caught by the "Ma" or killed by "the Outfit", a "very property-oriented group" (165). Also, concerning women, Joe has "never got along with women" because he "had too much dynamite" in him (169). In *Glengarry Glen Ross* the salesman's life is clearly depicted as a "permanent contest and [individual] struggle against others"; Carol, in *Oleanna*, seems to live in the shadow of her "Group" and depend on it for success, whereas John, despite his concern about his family, sees in his own personal and intellectual achievements (a prescribed course book at the university and tenure) the source for his success and power. In *Speed-The-Plow*, Karen may also be interpreted as being more concerned with people, the community, and the world than Fox, who is exclusively focused on his individual profit and success at the expense of those same people.

Mamet himself writes about his gambling and hunting in *The Cabin*, *Writing in Restaurants* and in *Make-Believe Town*, and testifies to his difficulty in understanding women in *Some Freaks*, although in *The Cabin* he also claims to

feel the need to create community in order to make of America a better world.

#### 4.2.1. Male-female

*Oleanna* is where male and female power relations are more clearly established. About this play Mamet himself claims in an interview with Geoffrey Norman and John Rezek<sup>7</sup> that

This play – and the film - is a tragedy about power. These are two people with a lot to say to each other; with legitimate affection for each other. But protecting their positions becomes more important than pursuing their own best interests (Kane, 2001: 125).

Right from the start John appears to blindly rely on the traditional values of academy-instituted power and on his superior academic jargon to exert power over Carol. In David Mamet's film version of the play, by clarifying the college rules from the very beginning, John may be interpreted as hiding behind those same rules and using them as an excuse for his ineffectiveness as a professor and as a denial of his responsibilities.

We are two people, all right? Both of whom have subscribed to certain arbitrary... certain institutional forms. That's right. You may say they are false or arbitrary. There's a harshness in the methodology of grading. But we have accepted it, both of us. And for better or worse... we must abide by the system which we have chosen... don't you think? I think so.

One might ask in what sense Carol has accepted these forms, which were there before she was born and which are imposed whether she likes them or not. And although he states: "I have no desire other than help you", his hypocrisy may seem patent in the distracted behaviour he evidences while uttering those words. He is clearly in a hurry, clearing his desk, stowing his belongings in his suitcase, and visibly looking for something which is, we soon find out, a book about real estate – the subject that truly matters to him now and that really occupies his mind.

His power may be seen as reinforced by his persistent use of academic

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<sup>7</sup> Playboy magazine Assistant Managing Editor in the 80s.

forms of discourse, which doesn't make communication and understanding any easier. Despite John's awareness of this fact, he goes on using a complex lexicon and circumlocutions with Carol, which may be interpreted as a wish to keep a distance and maintain his power over her to, intentionally or otherwise, feel free to do as she later on puts it "[t]o grant *this*. To deny *that*" (51), "to *deviate*. To *invent*, to transgress... to *transgress* whatever norms have been established for us" (52), "[t]o *buy*, to *spend*, to *mock*, to *summon*" (64,65). It seems here that academic discourse, like any other jargon, such as Carol's group's jargon, confers a sense of belonging to a restricted community and of having power over those who do not belong to it or master that jargon. Thus, the role conferred on academic language is not that of communication and expression of ideas, as it should be, but that of restricting meaning and, by restricting meaning, controlling it, making the rules and achieving all that really matters in universities and everywhere else: to win, to prosper. Later, in the first act, by exposing his fragilities, John is going to 'lower his guard' and allow his antagonist to get acquainted with his private feelings and thoughts, to penetrate his personal world. These fragilities are going to be used against him by Carol, who, also empowered by her group and the mastering of a whole new language, is going to impose her own rules over him. At the end of the day, one may say that Mamet's point was to prove that the old codes no longer work, that there is no such thing as absolute power, that permanent power is nothing but a misconception.

Women are almost excluded from Mamet's depiction of a capitalistic society since they are not powerful enough to strive in that environment; they are not cut out for tough individual contests against others. In that sense, Mamet would seem to be a biological essentialist. When they do get to be depicted, they always end up humiliated, defeated or playing the losers. Carol, who has been able to ruin John's professional life with the support of her group, and thus succeed over him, has also got herself into a very humiliating situation. To achieve that power and apparently avenge herself, she had to go through an open confrontation with John which ends with her being badly beaten up and cowering in fear in the corner of John's office. For his part, John sees her as a powerless and embittered pervert willing to take advantage of him and who needs to be subtly convinced to retract

her devastating charges against him. For these reasons, and also because in the eyes of the audience the truth of her actions and words come out blurred (as do John's), even empowered Carol emerges, to a certain extent, as still pathetic.

In *Speed-The-Plow* Karen's intentions are also blurred. Is she really willing to change the world, to make a difference and appeal to Gould's sensitivity and his better self? Could she read in Gould some signs of goodness and really like him



for being able to understand her honest point of view concerning the making of "The Bridge or, Radiation and the Half-Life of Society" script? Or is she just taking advantage of his weaker nature and insecurity to see her movie made? As the female characters are susceptible to being interpreted both as angels or devils, as ingénues or schemers, Karen also ends up losing her chance of either finding her true love, who would be able to join her in helping the world, or manipulating her boss into making her film and thus see herself promoted socially and economically. On his side, Fox

tries to push her out of the picture and triumph over her by appealing to Gould's sense of camaraderie and male bonding and by depicting Karen as "[s]ome broad from the Temporary Pool. A Tight Pussy



wrapped around Ambition" (78). The ineffectiveness of his words is only overcome by means of a direct confrontation, in a scene which may be interpreted as Karen's single moment of truth-telling. This moment, in which she admits she wouldn't have gone to bed with Gould if he hadn't promised to make "The Bridge or, Radiation and the Half-Life of Society" film, is maybe a moment of weakness, predicated on her womanly inability to face direct tough confrontations.

In *Edmond*, the protagonist has no success with women except for Glenna. The whores have pimps behind them controlling business, and these are the ones who exert power over them. When they don't, their power lies in their command of the sex business language. Edmond is just an inexperienced moneyless client, and therefore totally powerless, even in the face of women. Glenna is an ordinary girl with an ordinary job, and her relationship with Edmond is not established on a money basis. Theirs is a casual encounter, and therefore Edmond, as a middle-class and middle-aged white man, feels empowered to force her into obeying his wishes. Glenna is afraid of Edmond's lunatic behaviour; she panics and so does he. The woman is once more the loser as she ends up stabbed to death.

In the other plays women are not directly depicted, although one may clearly perceive their disempowered and disempowering status by the description that men make of them, as well as by the fragility they impose on those who are closest to them. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Levene's daughter is sick for some reason and seems to need her father's assistance and money to pay for it. This fact renders Levene worried, desperate for success and more vulnerable. Lingk's wife may be interpreted as Lingk's excuse to get the annulment of the contract without losing face, or else, as a powerful and threatening female, although supposedly advised by a male attorney. She may also represent the incompatible intrusion of communal family values into an all-male universe in which that kind of bonding is viewed as demeaning and weakening of a man's power. In Lingk's tentative conversation with Roma he says "I don't have the power. (*Pause.*) I said it" (92), and later he adds "[s]he told me I had to get back the check or call the State's Att..." (93). Lingk seems to find himself disempowered and ashamed of having to submit himself to his wife's orders. Ironically, he feels the need to excuse himself to Roma for apparently having wasted his time, in spite of having himself also been victim of Roma's swindle. Indeed, Lingk never confronts Roma even when his lies are exposed. Whether this is out of affection for him or personal weakness we never find out. Lingk just rushes out of the office. In *Lakeboat*, women are depicted as contradictory subservient sexual objects who like to be beaten up and shown who is in charge – or so Fred seems to believe, since he tells Dale that his uncle was right when he told him that "The way to get laid is to

treat them like shit" (162).

In the face of Mamet's usual portrayal of women as powerless, vulnerable, pathetic and undignified characters, it is not a surprise to find him accused of misogyny, particularly by feminist scholars like Marcia Blumberg, Katherine Burkman, Dorothy H. Jacobs, or Andrea Greenbaum. Marcia Blumberg, in *Staging Hollywood, Selling Out*, claims that in *Speed-The-Plow* "Mamet perversely celebrates Hollywood predatory machismo" (72). To endorse her view she explores the "dynamics of discrimination", in which she contends:

His [Fox's] egregious naming of Gould as an 'old woman experiencing menopause, who squats to pee' denigrates women and equates a feminized man with utter powerlessness, an object of abjection. This misogynistic, homophobic bent has appeared in other Mamet texts" (73).

Katherine H. Burkman, shares Blumberg's interpretation of Mamet's plays as misogynistic. She states in *The Web of Misogyny in Mamet's and Pinter's Betrayal Games* that

In each of these dramas [*Speed-The-Plow*, *Oleanna*, *House of Games* and *Homicide*] a female challenges and threatens the machismo world, exposing its misogyny and the attendant misanthropy that is at its core. Carol, the undergraduate student who is failing a course in *Oleanna*, complains to John that he patronizes her and that he berates a system that it has cost her dearly to buy into; his seeming generosity in offering to teach her outside of the system is merely, according to Carol, evidence of his pompous chauvinism. ... By the end of the drama, Carol has provoked John to the kind of assault of which she has already accused him, and as he calls her a 'cunt,' his repressed misogyny is blatantly out in the open (*ellipsis*, Burkman, 1998: 29).

And, in *Misogyny and Misanthropy: Anita Hill and David Mamet*, the same author goes on to endorse the same idea, as she states that

The 'demonization' of political correctness in Mamet's play becomes the means to a more general attack on feminism that blurs the issue of sexual harassment that the play also purports to investigate (Hall, 1998: 114).

Andrea Greenbaum, in her essay *Brass Balls: Masculine Communication and the Discourse of Capitalism in David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross*, also shares the above authors' points of view concerning misogyny in the plays of David Mamet, particularly in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, as she asserts that

The misogynist language that permeates the drama, and the vilification of



women, or more precisely, the essence of women (since women do not actually appear in the play), served to heighten the two binary oppositions between culturally defined notions of masculinity (both trait and normative perspectives) and femininity (*The Journal of Men's Studies*, Vol.8, Number 1, 1999: pp 43).

Dorothy H. Jacobs, in *Levene's Daughter: Positioning the Female in Glengarry Glen Ross*, also argues that "the ideology that informs the entire drama [is that in which the] female should be securely placed at home, preferably in the kitchen, precisely where Levene positions Harriet Nyborg" (Jacobs, 1996: 110), and that *Glengarry Glen Ross* is "a dramatization of how necessary the marginalization of women is to the maintenance of patriarchal ideologies" (112).

Although these scholars may claim that Mamet's dislike of women is striking in his plays, others, among them Leslie Kane, come on his defense. Kane truly believes that they are offering a superficial analysis of Mamet's plays rather than creating the necessary distancing to understand Mamet's purposes; that they tend to make interpretive mistakes based on a disregard of Mamet's ideas and concepts of what theatre is to him. As to Kane, Mamet is just confronting the audiences with the ridiculous nature of the Western World cultural gender stereotypes which still prevail in many areas of society.

[T]he character who utters the line in *Lakeboat* (1970) that "women are soft things with holes in the middle" is no feminist. But responses to such blatantly misogynist lines should be more complex than often is the case. In short, assuming that a character speaks for an author, or that a conclusion of a dramatic plot reflects the author's personal beliefs, is one of the most elementary of interpretive mistakes. At its base, this interpretive problem has to do with the nature of realism and with the broader notion of genre, particularly with regard to Mamet's ideas about "celebration" and dramatic irony and the writer's ideas about the nature of tragedy and comedy (Hudgins, 2001: 5).

As to David Mamet, despite his implication that the relationship between men and women cannot be peaceful, when he wonders in an interview with Ross Wetzsteon<sup>8</sup> "Why don't men and women get along?" (Kane, 2001: 13), concerning

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<sup>8</sup> A highly respected drama critic for the *Village Voice*.

the above subject, he often refutes his hatred or prejudice against women. He writes in *Some Freaks*, in an article about women, that men “feel, based on constant evidence, that women are better, stronger, more truthful, than men” (Mamet, 1994: 242), and in *Make-Believe Town: Essays and Remembrances*, in the essay *Between Men and Women*, he acknowledges that despite men and women’s skirmishes they belong together; which is, on his part, revealing of a wider view of the dimension of the world, particularly of the men-women relationship, than that he presents in his plays:

At the end of the day we [men or women] want someone to hold our hand.  
If we are happy we want someone to be for us and to whom we can be a  
hero. In misery we strive to be or find a victim.  
In either case we’re searching for a partner to share our idea of home  
(Mamet, 1996: 114-115).

In a televised interview with Charlie Rose<sup>9</sup> Mamet still states: “I think men and women need each other. I think men and women love each other” (Kane 2001: 178).

#### **4.2.2. Male-male**

In Mamet’s all-male society, men depict themselves as tough, insensitive creatures with “brass balls”, capable of enduring the tempests of the competitive and aggressive world they inhabit and capable of submitting women to their desires. In Edmond’s words, men must be “strong”, “feared” and “command respect” (*Edmond*, 266). Men always aspire for more; male relationships revolve around a competition for more money, a better social status, or a higher professional rank. Power is an essential tool to achieve success in the one-upmanship world they inhabit; who holds the power holds the ability to influence, to control, to gain advantage, and should therefore also hold the ability to survive and succeed. However, ironically, in most plays, those who start with the power also fail in the end; although there are no losers or winners amongst the most powerful or powerless characters in *Lakeboat*, due to their need to sustain a

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<sup>9</sup> A New York-based cultural commentator who hosted “Charlie Rose Show”.

cohesive community. It is worth noting that *Lakeboat* is something of a nostalgic idyll, of which *Glengarry Glen Ross* is a dystopian doppelganger. In *Glengarry Glen Ross* Mitch and Murray get robbed, although the thief (Levene) is finally revealed, Moss does not succeed with the leads he is assigned, and Roma sees his contract annulled. In *Edmond* the protagonist ends up in prison, defiled like the women he has sought to defile and deprived of his sought-after freedom, in *Oleanna* John sees his professional career ruined by the end of the play, and in *Speed-The-Plow* Gould wastes the chance to become a “good man”. Thus, it seems that Mamet’s capitalistic world is inhabited by people in the face of a system grounded in principles that do not work, at least according to common logic. Mamet may be a poet of competition “red in tooth and claw” but he is no apologist for it.

The establishment of power relations amongst male characters is based on the “symbols” mentioned in the sub-section Symbols of Power. The powerless men tend to try constantly to win over the powerful through their speech acts; sometimes their positions shift, as happens between Fox and Gould by the end of the play, at other times they don’t, as in Levene’s attempt to bribe Williamson and get the good “leads”. When the powerful try to manipulate the powerless they also seem to be unsuccessful; Roma is unable to talk Lingk out of giving up the deal, Moss fails in his attempt to convince Aaronow to break into the office to steal the leads and John is ineffective in his effort to persuade Carol to withdraw the charges against him (although there is a palpable moment of weakness when he might have succeeded but, again, the phone rings and that timely moment is lost). Notwithstanding this, Williamson reveals some shrewdness and success in his ability to spot Levene’s incautious slip of the tongue that exposes his wrongdoing; although he is not one of those in competition for the top position on “the board”, and so he is never really vulnerable or under pressure.

Although Williamson is victim of constant vituperation, all salesmen end up by accepting his orders; he is the most powerful figure in the office as the enforcer of Mitch and Murray’s orders. The position of the salesmen on the “board” also mark the degree of competitiveness and power established amongst them. “The board” is Mamet’s most conspicuous symbol of fine gradations of power. It is to be

noted that the most direct adversaries never team up. The fight for power between them is always utterly aggressive, as witnessed in the already mentioned altercation between Moss and Roma.

Despite the fact that their lives are a permanent contest against each other, men also seek support in their mates. They tend to congregate according to their affinities and form contingent partnerships of mutual benefit. Fox and Gould have stuck together for eleven years as they share common interests. Fox cajoles Gould as he constitutes his possibility of achieving some success and power. When his access to power is jeopardized, his anger is notable and he addresses Gould aggressively calling him “wimp”, “coward”, “old woman” and, in a moment of self-centred honesty, states that he is costing him his fortune. Fox attacks his source of trouble speaking of Karen as “[t]he broad [who] wants power”, who “trades the one thing she has got, her *looks*, [to] get into a position of authority – through [Gould]”, and as having lured Gould in (71). He also tells Gould: “You’re nothing to her but what you can *do* for her” (72). Ironically, in depicting Karen, Fox is depicting himself. In Fox’s mind Karen is yearning for the same power that he is fighting for and for which he would be able to kill Gould right there in that office (70). Later on, in the paradoxical statement “I love this guy, too” (77), Fox testifies once more to his reversed values and the true nature of his long-lasting relationship with Gould, since he mistakes love for opportunism. Since that is a world of tough negotiators, hypocrites and self-serving cynical guys, empowered males always get their moments of success, particularly over women, even if they are only temporary.

Likewise, since Roma was once taught the business by Levene; they team up and share some kind of symbiosis. As already mentioned on page 46, in 3.1. *Dialogue and Scene Setting / Building*, their relationship is based on self-interest, as the environment they inhabit leaves them no alternative. In the society portrayed, male-male relationships are seldom based on disinterested affection since there’s always some opportunism underlying them. Therefore, male characters are condemned to live a life of isolation in spite of their human need for trust, authenticity and communality; they cannot even trust women, who they feel compelled to regard as weak and unreliable creatures.

As male characters hold women in low regard, they also seek power through the feminization of male opponents. As the dominant public or business culture is that men should be virile and not castrated, should dominate instead of being mastered, when a male loses power, he immediately unleashes a torrent of misogynistic or homophobic invective at his opponent to deny by contrast his lack of authority and power. To bring forward the possibility to mind that his opponent possesses feminine or homosexual qualities also works as a self-appeasing strategy, a self-esteem booster and a psychological device for revenge. This strategy can be witnessed, for example, in the altercation between Roma and Williamson, when the former is lead to believe that he has lost his deal because of the latter, and that his top position on the “board” is threatened, and in the altercations between Fox and Gould, in scene three, when Fox sees his starry future menaced.

#### **4.3. Language and Transformation of Character**

##### **4.3.1. Carol**

Although both characters in *Oleanna* are invested with the power of the group they belong to, the academic group being apparently stronger than Carol's group, the renegotiation of their power is a rather confrontational process in which language is the tool they use to gain advantage over each other. The defense of their own positions resembles a game in which that who controls language and is able to manipulate it and use it to his/her best advantage is over the top and can set the rules. While in the first act John is clearly at ease with the academic lexicon and uses it to make clear who is in charge, Carol is ill at ease; the second and third acts reveal a transformed Carol, one who seems to possess a deeper insight and a mastering of feminist and legal lexicon which allows her to defend her quest and challenge John's power. John is then ill at ease with Carol's new posture and language.

As already stated in the sub-section about the Establishment of Power

Relations between males and females, during the first act John is very self-assured about the position he occupies in the academy and of the power it endows him with. Carol, as already stated in the sub-section about The Academy in *Oleanna*, reveals herself ignorant of the academic jargon and maybe also of the college rules-pupil/teacher relations, which John insists on making clear. During the first act, Carol is presented as naïve and helpless, when pleading for help, understanding, a passing grade, or interfering with John's personal affairs; and puzzled, angry and humiliated while she finds out more and more about John's personal problems and liberalist ideas regarding higher education, which John mistakenly tells her as he disregards the fact that, as an outsider, she is intellectually unprepared to understand those views. However, her resolution in getting a passing grade seems paramount at the beginning. She follows John all over the place in anger and despair. She claims to come from a different social and economic background, to feel unable to "go back and tell her grades to them" (11) (probably her group), she feels the need to "be helped", to "know something", to "get on in the world" (12). As the presentation of her reasons appear ineffective, she gets angrier and self-commiserates to the point of earning what seems to be John's sympathy. She had already interfered in the Professor's private life, wanting to know about his new house, and now it is going to be John who, in a personal father-daughter attitude, as he puts it - "I'm talking to you as I'd talk to my son" (19) - apparently attempts to make her understand the reason for her self-commiseration by revealing further information about his private life and personal problems. These unwise confessional moments, in which he really seems to break the stricture between student and professor and reveal his anxieties/weaknesses, are going to open a breach in his institutionalised power and allow Carol to use them against him later on.

Carol's inability to understand John's language and course book and/or to make John change her grade, triggers in her despair and anger that will only be appeased by what may be legitimately interpreted as revenge. She listens to John's covert thoughts about the Tenure Committee and his theory about higher education, which in his view is "hazing", "artificial", "a ritual", "an article of faith", "something-other-than-useful", "an exploitation", "a sick game", where tests are

designed by and for idiots to test memory instead of intelligence, and feels perplexed not only at the disparity between John's theory and practice, but also at the denial of her own values. By discrediting the usefulness of higher education while craving for tenure, John is not only being inconsiderate of Carol, and attacking her whole set of values about college, but also attacking the system of which he is a representative member and admitting, as he does in his initial monologue in Act Two, that he likes it and is complying with it to his own economic advantage. Carol is given another reason to feel angry, diminished, and insulted. Unable to succeed through the conventional means, Carol decides to plot against John. Thus, the former empowering tutor capable of transmitting the necessary knowledge that would allow her to get on in the world is now envisaged as an oppressor and a discredited hindrance to her own empowerment that has to be removed.

During the First Act, Carol's moments of confession never consist of a critical opinion about something or somebody and are never really about her inner self, which gives John or the audience little opportunity to assess her morality. However, her single potential moment of intimate confession: "I'm bad" (38), aborted by the ringing telephone, reveals that she has been concealing something about herself that nobody knows. The reason for her badness is not revealed, leaving a doubt in the audience's mind that allows for a certain ambiguity of judgment about her character. Thus, in the face of the course of events, one may legitimately wonder whether her badness is of masochist nature, since she keeps returning to John's office at his call, despite the court officers' advice to do the contrary, to confront and challenge him till the point of being hated and beaten up, or of sexual nature, since her charges of sexual harassment can be the result of some sort of covert sexual perversity, or even of vicious nature, as she reveals a Delilah potential when she (possibly) lures John into confessing his secrets to her to then betray him and deprive him of his power on her behalf and on behalf of her group.

In the Second Act, the audience witnesses an unexpected reversal of roles. Whereas in the First Act it is Carol who searches for help in John's office, in the Second and Third Acts it is John who asks her into his office: "What do you want

of me?” (45), asks Carol in the beginning of the Second Act, or “Professor. I came here as a *favor*. At your personal request. Perhaps I should not have done so” (50), and John, at the beginning of the Third Act, while trying to hide his anger and despair in the hope of still being able to convince her to retract her charges against him says “I have asked you here...” (59). Now, it is the professor who has a problem, the one who needs something the student can provide him with. Carol’s posture is now more self-assured and her outfit more formal and respectful. The former innocent, unintelligent, confused, unconfident, and frightened Carol emerges in the Second Act, maybe due to the influence of her supporting and empowering group, as a confrontational, opinionated, and opportunistic character. She is now in charge and able to counter-argue with John. She seems to have acquired a specialised language too, and transformed herself into a politically correct scold motivated by a group, apparently of female students, who have orchestrated a charge of sexual harassment against John.



Although Carol goes on questioning the meaning of some words, she feels empowered by her supporting group and uses a more assertive and accusatory language: “Then why can’t you use that word?” (45), a request with which John complies immediately in order not to make her mad and be able to go on with his rhetorical act. Carol is blunt and deconstructs his politically-couched language summing up his euphemistic discourse as “What you can do to force me to retract?” (46), to which John hypocritically and in a less authoritative tone replies “That is not what I meant at all” (48). But she distorts his words, as she often does, by saying that he has uttered words that he didn’t really utter, such as: “No, you said what amends can you make. To force me to retract.” (46), in a strategy that may be meant to set him up and to make him admit the truth of his motives. In the meantime, the audience realises that Carol has resented John’s condescension and has levelled charges against him. Her charges are accurate in fact, but neither



context nor John's intentions are considered. She appears to have distorted and manipulated the truth of all John's naïve words and gestures, as can be witnessed by the excerpts read by John from the accusation report: "He said he 'liked' me. That he 'liked being with me'. He'd let me write my examination paper over, if I could come back oftener to see him in his office" (48), or "He told me he had problems with his wife; and that he wanted to take off the artificial stricture of Teacher and Student. He put his arm around me..." (48). Accused by him of making ludicrous accusations, Carol addresses a bewildered John in an authoritative and confrontational discourse in which she not only speaks for herself and "the student body" (47) but also reveals the possibility of having truly set him up:

Do you deny it? Can you deny it...? Do you see? Don't you see? You don't see do you? (...) You think, you think you can deny these things happened; or, if they *did*, if they *did*, that they meant what you *said* they meant. Don't you see? You drag me in here, you drag us, to listen to you 'go on', and 'go on' about this or that, or we don't 'express' ourselves very well. We don't say what we mean. Don't we? We *do* say what we mean. And you say that 'I don't understand you...' (*ellipsis*: 48,49).

Here Carol is reverting roles; she is making it clear to John that she has power over meanings, too, that she can make the rules, too, that it is not for him to decide about the meaning of language any longer. Now it is not "they" who don't understand "him", it's "he" who doesn't understand "them"; now it is Carol and her group who hold the power to decide, not John. Further on, when reading from her notes about John's behaviour toward his students on previous days, the audience need no longer wonder why she had been taking those notes:

Carol: Excuse me, one moment, will you?

*(she reads from her notes.)*

The twelfth: "Have a good day, dear."

The fifteenth: "Now, don't you look fetching..."

April seventeenth: "If you girls would come over here..." I saw you. I saw you, Professor. For two semesters sit there, stand there and exploit our, as you thought, "paternal prerogative," and what is that but rape (66, 67).

At this point it seems fair for the audience to believe that she, and maybe her group, had been concocting a plot against John and that Carol's attitude in the

First Act might have been part of her, or her Group's, scheme to gather proof to opportunistically charge John with sexual harassment in an attempt to obtain by the back door the academic success she (or they) could not earn.

The roles have been inverted. By formally charging John with sexual harassment, Carol is moving her case out of an academic setting and into a legal setting, forcing John to stand on terrain alien to him. In doing so, she is not only gaining discursive power but also situational advantage. The student has become empowered and the professor disempowered. The dominant discourse has shifted from academic to a politically correct feminist discourse backed by recent shifts in the law and institutional policy on discrimination, as exemplified below.

I came here (...) [o]n my behalf, and on behalf of my group. And you speak of the tenure committee, one of whose members is a woman, as you know. And though you might call it Good Fun, or An Historical Phrase, or an Oversight, or All the Above, to refer to the committee as Good Men and True, it is a demeaning remark. It is a sexist remark, and to overlook it is to countenance continuation of that method of thought (*ellipsis*: 50, 51).

Later, she deploys typical question-answer courtroom discourse:

Carol: Do you hold yourself harmless from the charges of sexual exploitativeness...?

John: Well, I... I... I... You know I, as I said. I... think I am not too old to *learn*, and I *can learn*, I...

Carol: Do you hold yourself innocent of the charge of...

John: ... wait, wait, wait... All right, let's go back to... (71).

Carol has publicly accused John of incorrect behaviour and he needs her to drop her charges. She doesn't need him any longer as it is still her who can decide exactly what words and actions mean.

Carol: My charges are not trivial. You see that in the haste, I think, with which they were accepted. A *joke* you have told, with a sexist tinge. The language you use, a verbal or physical caress, yes, yes, I know, you say that it is meaningless. I understand. I differ from you. To lay a hand on someone's shoulder.

John: It was devoid of sexual content.

Carol: I say it was not. I SAY IT WAS NOT. Don't you begin to see...? IT'S NOT FOR YOU TO SAY.

John is now reduced to the disempowered condition of the inarticulate student. Confused and on the verge of losing his job, John seems unable to understand

what is going on and just as Carol did in the First Act he insists that he can learn: "I am not too old to *learn*, and I *can learn*, I..." (71). On her side, Carol assumes the role of the teacher: "I came here to instruct you" (67), and, in doing so, she is using the same power she criticizes in John. By anticipating what John thinks of her she is not only defining herself but also proving she possesses insight she didn't show in the First Act: "You think I'm a, of course I do. You think I'm a frightened, repressed, confused, I don't know, abandoned young thing of some doubtful sexuality, who wants, power and revenge. Don't you?" (68).

Carol's new insight is also present in her conclusion that John's former appeals for free speech and free thought are illusory and that those rights are impossible to exercise in any oppressive relationship, such as is that here between teacher and student:

"Why do you hate me? Because you think me wrong? No. Because I have, you think, *power* over you. Listen to me. Listen to me, Professor. It is the power that you hate. So deeply that, that any atmosphere of free discussion is impossible. It's not 'unlikely.' It's *impossible*. Isn't it?" (68, 69).

By legitimating her power with the support of legal rules and the support of her women's group, their agenda, and her responsibility to the students who suffer what she suffers (65), and by being willing to force John to withdraw his book from "inclusion as a representative example of the university" (75) for being "questionable" (73), Carol, and her group, are not willing to change the oppressing system they criticize, but rather are prepared to re-inforce it and perpetuate a version of it for their own behalf. Carol's words and irony in the last sentence of the following quotation are clear as to their intention:

Carol: You have an agenda, we have an agenda. I am not interested in your feelings or your motivation, but your actions. If you would like me to speak to the Tenure Committee, here is my list. You are a Free Person, you decide (74).

Carol refuses to accept John's professions of good intentions and John refuses to accept Carol's demands. In his frustrating inability to recover his lost power, and when he finds that the case has spilled over into criminal proceedings, John instinctively resorts to his superior male physical strength as a means to impose it (see page 55), which aggravates his disempowerment and exposes as bankrupt

his claim to moral superiority.

In a radical reading, one might also argue that the play echoes the female masochism and male sadism of John Osborn's *Look Back in Anger*. Maybe John has wanted to hit her all along and she has wanted to be hit. Carol, "a frightened, repressed, confused (...) abandoned young thing" (*ellipsis*, 68), despite feeling hurt, humiliated and angry, keeps returning to John's office to confront and defy him, as if willing to be hated and punished for her behaviour, as she gloats "Do you hate me now?" (68). John, as a hurt and angry "pedantic" (45) professor who has an interest in the *status quo* (56) and whose craved tenure is seriously menaced because of Carol's accusations, might also have restrained himself from physical aggression until the last moment, in the hope that he might persuade her into withdrawing her charges against him.

#### **4.3.2. Edmond**

Although the development of Edmond's character has already been discussed in the sub-section about invective and profanity (see pages 55 to 58), since it is closely related with his use or avoidance of aggressive language, I shall present in this sub-section a more complete analysis of how the character's development is reflected in the language that he uses from the beginning until the end. The character's transformational aspects already focused in the above cited sub-section will be referred to more generally.

In Edmond, the transformation of character is projected onto the language register used. At first Edmond reveals a polite formal register, proper for the sophisticated middle-class he belongs to, where it is taken as empowering. However, that language register proves ineffective and effete in a cruder social setting. There people resort to unrefined, unsophisticated demotic speech to make themselves understood and establish relationships. Edmond's sophisticated language is taken as non-authoritative and timid, and therefore he is constantly deceived and taken advantage of. In contrast, the pimps, whores and con tricksters' cunning and gross language exudes toughness, aggressiveness, and

authority. In the social setting presented we can witness Edmond's gradual appropriation of these empowering linguistic characteristics as a need to explore and experience other perspectives on life, to understand and make himself understood in his renunciation of his former liberal self, and also as a mechanism of survival, to "command respect" (266) and feel empowered. Eventually, imprisoned, in a return to a confined and constrained situation that parallels his former married and working life, Edmond transforms again. He is now calmer, he seems to have acquiesced to his new situation and adopted an identity that satisfies his human needs, which makes him feel released and peaceful. He is now dedicated to retrospection, meditation and wonder. His language acquires its former characteristics; it is quieter, more polite and clean of expletives.

Edmond may be seen as going through three different phases during his mental and psychological transformation. In his first phase he appears as a well-off white married man, who looks tense and upset, and who is not entirely rational, as he allows his life to be ruled by the mystic suggestion of a Fortune-Teller who informs him that he is not where he belongs. Without further explanation or reasoning on his part, that "advice" seems to have acted upon his long hidden and repressed wishes and constituted the desired excuse (although irrational) to liberate himself from the responsibilities and constrictions of his life. During his first developing stage, Edmond's language is clear of expletives, and his speech obeys the social norms of politeness. He uses a low or moderate tone of voice, euphemisms and clichés to talk with the Man in the bar about his intimate life: "My wife and I are incompatible" (227), to address his wife: "You don't interest me spiritually or sexually" (224), or to speak with the whores "I'd like to have intercourse with you" (241). Edmond's naivety is expressed in the confidence he constantly places in strangers. He confides his personal problems to the man in the bar and addresses the whores with an out-of-place politeness. At the Allegro he uses frankness and expects loyalty from a whore he has never met before: "I'm putting myself at your *mercy*... this is my first time in a place like this. I don't want to be taken advantage of. You understand?" (230), and does the same at the whorehouse: "I've never done this before" (241), or "Thank you. I appreciate this. Would it offend you if I wore a rubber?" (250). He thanks the Fortune-Teller, the

Man in the bar, the whore in the whorehouse, the bartender at the Allegro and the B-girl, to whom he also apologises. His civilized language is kept up despite the several frustrated and defrauded deals for sexual gratification. Although he is money-conscious in his business transactions, his good manners and striking social naivety help prefigure him as an excellent “mark” for the various hustlers he meets.

As a consequence of these unsuccessful exploratory encounters, Edmond grows angry and frustrated. During his learning process, his first violent and traumatic confrontation occurs with two petty criminals, the Shill and the Sharper. Edmond, stubbornly and apparently unaware of the possible consequences, questions the card-sharper repeatedly and defiantly: “You let me see those cards. (...) Give me those cards, fella” (*ellipsis*: 247), and ends up beaten and mugged. His assertive confrontation, his last word and what happens next are the first signs of Edmond’s assimilation of the street jargon, the ethos of the place, and of his degradation. The second stage of his metamorphosis lies ahead. At the hotel, Edmond shows that he has understood that polite frankness is counterproductive, as it undermines any attempt to succeed. He lies deliberately for the first time: “I lost my wallet” (248). He also seems to have perceived the prevailing social indifference, hostility and lack of humanity, and shows his resentment of it when he asks the Clerk, in a deeply upset tone of voice, “Do you want to live in this kind of world? Do you want to live in a world like that?” (249). Outside, in the street, after buying a survival knife at the pawn shop, he seems more self-confident, looks more aggressive and suspicious. In his interaction with the Pimp his speech has changed; he is now blunt, deconstructing the pimp’s euphemisms, and his language is assertive:

Pimp: / know. We get you some *action*, my friend. We get you something sweet to shoot on. I know. Thass what I’m doing here.

Edmond: What are you saying?

Pimp: I’m saying that we going to find you something nice.

Edmond: You’re saying that you’re going to find me a woman (257, 258).

He also reveals some distrust

Pimp: Give me the twenty.

Edmond: I’ll give it to you when I see the girl.

Pimp: Hey, I’m not going to leave you, man, you coming with me. We goin’ to

see the girl.

Edmond: Good. I'll give it to you then (258, 259).

This time he wasn't caught unprepared. He had already learned his lesson and knew what might await him. When the Pimp tries to mug him, he strikes back with his survival knife. All his wildest survival instincts are released, his words are freed and his street argot fluent, as cited on page 57 of the sub-section on invective and profanity. His language and methods are now as aggressive and violent as the Card-Sharpers or the Pimp's. Edmond's mental state is hyper stimulated, his mind is now as disintegrated as the world around him.

In the Coffeehouse he looks self-satisfied, released, and sounds high-spirited because, as he says, he is "alive" (262). He tells Glenna something he had just found out: "you can do anything you *want* to do" (262) but "[t]he white race is doomed" (262) because they live their lives restrained by social norms; as he says

(...) it's more comfortable to *accept* a law than question it and live your life.

All of us. *All* of us.

We've bred the life out of ourselves. And we live in a fog.

We live in a dream. Our life is a *schoolhouse*, and we're dead (*ellipsis*: 263).

The Man's mephistophelian theory about life, alluded to on page 56, and his support of the niggers' lifestyle: "There are responsibilities [niggers] never have accepted" (228), and "I don't blame them one small bit" (226), seems to be now postulated by Edmond. Thus, living without restraints, without responsibilities, like the black men are said to live, makes him feel free and alive. Indeed, he seems to be vindicating a totally irresponsible theory which would only lead to the kind of society he has so vehemently criticized at the hotel, and to anarchy.

His mind is utterly upset and he has become irrational. He is now a completely different man, willing to do anything he wants, without restraints, and to follow his own instincts. He feels released; his language is of a crude frankness which seems to him to have direct access to the truth:

Edmond: I've lived in a fog for thirty-four years. Most of the life I have to live. It's gone. It's gone. I wasted it. Because I didn't know. And you know what the answer is? To *live*. *I want to go home with you tonight*.

Glenna: Why?

Edmond: Why do you think? I want to fuck you. It's as simple as that (263).

Now he is as naturally blunt and unrepressed by social norms as the whores, pimps or tricksters of the night streets of New York. His morality and values are reversed. He has been undergoing a self-discovery in the wrong direction; it has been one of degradation and depravation.

Still feeling liberated and invigorated by the novelty of his experience, the way he tells Glenna about his confrontation with the Pimp reveals his state of irrationality and the self-centered nature of human instincts: “When I spoke *back* to him I DIDN’T FUCKING WANT TO UNDERSTAND... let *him* understand *me*” (265). His confrontation is a cathartic moment, a revelation to and of himself, in which he says he has a clear understanding of black people and cleaning ladies: “I wanted to KILL him. In that *moment* thirty years of prejudice came out of me (...) I swear to God, for the first *time* I saw. THEY’RE PEOPLE, TOO” (*ellipsis*: 265). He has a clear insight of the ethos of the place: “There is NO LAW, there is no history, there’s only now” (266). Edmond exhorts complete freedom of thought and action: “I’m not lying to *you*, don’t lie to *me*. And don’t lie to yourself” (269). They both get out of control and ironically Glenna says “You are the *devil* (...) I curse *you*” (*ellipsis*: 272). Edmond’s irrationality and psychopathy are now deeply aggravated and he stabs Glenna to death upon very little provocation. Henceforth, Edmond sets off for the third phase of his metamorphosis.



Edmond looks tired, confused and anguished as his descent into Hell proceeds. He stops near a Mission where he begins to listen to words of divine forgiveness, which he feels to be addressed to him. He seems to believe in divine redemption and to feel the need for change, as he offers to give testimony. However, it seems that redemption is harder to achieve. He is accidentally caught by the police and, at the police station, he tells the interrogator: “I’ve been unwell. I’ll confess to you that I’ve been confused, but, but... I’ve learned my lesson and I’m ready to go home” (281). His (apparent) regrets come too late, at a point of no



turning back, and he will have to pay for his crimes in jail.

In prison, in a new and unknown environment to him, he is happy to receive the visit of his wife. He seems to miss her and wish she cared for him. He appears lonely, retrospective, insightful and regretful as he talks to her

I don't suppose you're, uh, inclined (or, nor do I think you should be) to stand by me. (...)

I know at certain times we wished we could be... closer to each other. I can say that now. I'm sure this is the way you feel when someone near you dies. You never said the things you wanted desperately to say. It would have been so simple to say them. (*Pause.*) But you never did (*ellipsis*: 282, 283).

His mode of speech returns to what it used to be: calm tone of voice, no expletives, and all norms of politeness attended to. He believes himself to be safe, like no "cataclysm" (285) is going to happen, and has finally found peace in prison because it is "simple" (284) there. He also feels fearless, as he states in his interchange with his black cellmate about the white race that

We are fearful. All the time. Because we can't trust what we know. (...) But I don't feel it since I'm here. (*Pause.*) I don't feel it since I'm here. I think I've settled. So, so, so I must be somewhere safe. Isn't that funny? (*ellipsis*: 285, 286).

These words reflect Edmond's former naïve posturing. He seems to be oblivious of the fact that prisons are full of criminals and violence; and that is going to cost him dearly. This time he becomes the victim of sodomy. He reaches the bottom of degradation and his feelings about this new environment are proved wrong. Somehow, this excruciating moment seems to have functioned as an exorcism of all evils (gratuitous sex, racism, prejudice, crime), and as a penance for all his former moral and physical crimes. There, imprisoned, he feels lonely and as if his 'self' had been expunged of everything in it. In his interchange with the Chaplain, he reveals his suffering and soulless state

Chaplain (*pause*): Are you lonely?

Edmond: Yes. (*Pause.*) Yes. (*Pause.*) I feel so *alone*...

Chaplain: Shhhh...

Edmond: I'm so *empty*. ...

Chaplain: Maybe you are ready to be *filled* (288, 289).

This Chaplain's last assertion, which sounds ironic in its implication that maybe Edmond is ready to start a new life in prison, resembles a cliché, hollowed of

genuine meaning. Edmond gets angry at it and retorts with sarcasm

If nothing's impossible to God, then let him let me walk *out* of here and be *free*. Let him cause a new *day*. In a perfect land full of *life*. And *air*. Where people are *kind* to each other, and there's *work* to do. Where we grow up in *love*, and in security we're *wanted* (289).

By saying this he is questioning the possibility for change, for being “filled”, for an ideal life and world.

Edmond becomes retrospective and wishes for peace and withdrawal. When he has a visitor he finds an excuse not to see him/her. Sodomy has had a fatal effect on his manly nature, which has also reversed. As I have already stated in the sub-section on Invective and Profanity, Edmond's language remains emasculated as he goes on to show a submissive empathy with his cellmate. Edmond reveals an acquiescence not seen before. Either he has peacefully accepted his new womanly condition or he has finally found that what he had subconsciously been looking for: his true nature as a homosexual. His self-discovery journey goes on, now enclosing the whole human race, and revealing transcendent concerns about human life and destiny. He has finally and ironically become the reverse of what he used to be: a contemplative spiritual-bound homosexual pacifist in seclusion in opposition to his former earthly homophobic racist who had set off on a supposedly liberating journey of self-discovery “to get away from himself” (227) and to “feel like a man” (228).

After *Edmond*'s première in 1982, Don Shewey interviewed David Mamet, whose words the former quoted in a New York Times article of 24 October 1982, entitled “David Mamet Puts a Dark Urban Drama on Stage”. In this article one can read Mamet's own analysis of the play

‘Edmond’ [is] a fairy tale, a myth about modern life. “Because Edmond allows himself to express his hatred of blacks and homosexuals,” Mr. Mamet said, “He thinks he's free, that he's faced the truth of himself. Only at the end of the play, after having completely destroyed his personality, does he realize how incredibly destructive and hateful an attitude that is. In fact, he winds up in a homosexual alliance with a black guy. Because of that alliance, because he resolves those basic dichotomies, I think it's a very, very hopeful play [...] There are moments of real beauty in the play, and I think that rather than being about violence, it's a play about someone searching for the truth, for God, for release. [...] ‘Edmond’ presents the tragic view of a man who doesn't think faith exists. He is committing the modern New York heresy of

denying the life of the soul' (Sauer, 2003: 132).

## Chapter 5

### Language and Gender

Whether Mamet has or has not something against women, apart from the reference to a single woman who occupies a position of authority in the College Tenure Committee in *Oleanna*, (which was undoubtedly something that was becoming common in the educational context of that time), the fact is that in the five plays I'm talking about here there are no other institutionally powerful women, no women in positions of authority. They are all in subordinate positions. In Mamet, women's (putative) power doesn't come directly or openly from institutional structures, but rather through force of character, marriage or because they have money. Although Carol is supported by her group and legal advisors, she is too coherent in her argumentations to allow us to believe that her power is the sole consequence of her new-found supporters, and Karen, in intimacy, proves capable of persuading Gould to take her side, Mrs Nyborg, as Mr Nyborg's wife, also needs to sign the contract to validate it, and Mrs Lingk, who is, in fact, the only woman who is directly said by a man to have the power, has the last word on her husband's and Roma's business deal, as she seems to be the owner of the money that would pay for the piece of land in Glengarry Highlands, in Florida.

The fact that Mamet chooses contexts in which women are not empowered - such as the world of business - may suggest one of two things: either he is not interested in the relationship between men and powerful women - as he admits to knowing nothing about women (Mamet, 1994: 240) - or that generally one doesn't find many powerful women in the world, particularly in the world of business. However, both of these reasons may be true. On the one hand, Mamet has mainly lived a life surrounded by men and has interested himself in so-called manly activities, as he recounts in his many essays. On the other hand, historical evidence shows that at the beginning of the eighties through into the nineties a revolution swept through America making it more precarious for everybody, taking away benefits that people used to enjoy, making jobs more insecure, and the

workplace an arena of fierce competition. And although both men and women lived in a situation of mutual precariousness in respect to their employment, women's situation, despite the significant changes in social attitudes towards them, proved to be more vulnerable, as they had started from a disadvantaged position; that is, as less experienced workers who arrived in the world of work later than men and found themselves trapped between low-paid jobs and greater domestic responsibilities. In the statistics gathered by the US Census Bureau and presented by the Office on the Economic Status of Women in the USA<sup>10</sup>, one can find evidence that there has always been a gap between men and women's earnings. There, the earnings gap between men and women workers from 1955 to 2005 is presented for analysis, and one can conclude that the largest earnings gap between US women and men workers occurred in the early 1970s (56,6%, in 1973) and the greatest decreases in the 1980s, when the gap decreased by more than 10 percent between 1980 and 1990. However, the same source says, these decreases were due in part to decreases in men's median earnings. Concerning women's professional positions in the corporate ladder, only a very small percentage of highly educated and talented women would occupy top positions of authority. According to a US federal study conducted in 1995<sup>11</sup>, males still held 95 percent of all top management positions. This scenario is evidence that America has advanced a lot in terms of the rhetoric of equality, but that reality lagged well behind that rhetoric.

The prevailing social positions of men and women, particularly in the blue-collar world, are in effect different, and the way men and women interrelate depend on those same social positions. That is to say, women wouldn't sell themselves for sex, or have to make allegations of sexual harassment (genuine or false), if they had very good incomes and secure positions in life; that is, if they were not exposed to the kinds of risk that often follow from economic desperation. But as women often find themselves at the bottom of the social pyramid, they find that they effectively do not have as much freedom of choice as their male

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/oesw/fs/historicalwagegap1955\\_2005.pdf](http://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/oesw/fs/historicalwagegap1955_2005.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.allbusiness.com/population-demographics/demographic-groups/12314886-1.html>

counterparts. Therefore, the gender issue is most often predicated on the economic one. Karen is the secretary, she is not the boss. She schemes because she occupies a disadvantageous position; which is not to deny the fact that sexuality endows her with some power. So, theoretically, disempowered women have recourse to some strategies to temporarily empower themselves, but generally speaking, people who already have social power don't need to resort to these methods. Men are not different from women, but their social positions are often different, and they have different assets which they can deploy in different ways. In situations of desperation, men can resort to their physical superiority to gain advantage, whereas women tend to resort to their sexuality for the same purpose. Therefore, despite some evidence that Mamet takes a more biologically essentialist view of the world than many would share, since men and women offer the same kinds of response when experiencing the same types of pressure, I believe that all characters in his plays should first of all be considered as people first and only afterward as men and women.

The question of gender equality is a complex one and I cannot hope to review it all here, although I do believe that women have made many solid gains in recent times. Those gains have been felt across the corporate hierarchy, more in educated circles than at the bottom, but in the blue-collar world, which is the one Mamet writes about, a sense of male entitlement seems to prevail more than it does in the white-collar world. Therefore, Mamet presents us with a highly selective world of usually small blue-collar male groups of people who operate in the world of private enterprise, where competitive instincts are at a premium and from which powerful women are excluded. He generally doesn't choose contexts where greater social access for women is an issue, except for the university context of *Oleanna*, even though big issues such as sexual harassment or unfair treatment are more covertly than overtly presented, since power relations, again, overwhelm the treatment of other possible issue.

By carefully selecting the particular contexts in which his drama takes place, and by excluding powerful women from that context, Mamet is not offering a wholesale representation of the world, since there were then powerful women in it. Although women were not powerful in the proportion that they perhaps should

be<sup>12</sup>, some were already in the board rooms, which was significant in that modern world of the 1980s. Just to name a few women with relevant institutional power in the American society of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, I should mention Patience S. Latting, who was elected mayor of Oklahoma City in 1971, Jane Byrne, who governed Chicago by 1979, Dianne Feinstein, who governed San Francisco at the same time<sup>13</sup>, Sharon Pratt Dixon, who was elected mayor of Washington D.C. in 1990, Margaret Heckler and Elizabeth Dole, who were appointed to Ronald Reagan's Cabinet as Secretary of Health and Human Services and Secretary of Transportation, respectively, and Sandra Day O'Connor, who was also appointed by Ronald Reagan the first woman on the United States Supreme Court, in 1981. For some, women's gains are not a political argument anymore; it is rather a managerial argument in which women individually need to prove their value, reaffirm their competence and erase any remaining prejudice so as to open the path for other women and for, *de facto*, equal pay; because until women and men achieve equal pay at all levels of society, they will not be treated as equals.

As I have previously stated, Mamet's plays constitute a very selective version of reality; they offer a very limited and unbalanced view of the world. Characters are positioned in an exclusive economic setting in which they come into conflict in rather predefined ways. All relations are adversarial and imply certain points of advantage, which renders the impression that the world is a place where fierce and competitive struggle is needed to hold one's position in the social structure. Mamet's world maybe seems unnaturally antagonistic and manipulative because everybody is always using everybody else, and one must bear in mind that social relations are not always quite so Darwinist. Mamet has also got a rather over-determined view about the difference between male and female; he has a

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<sup>12</sup> At <http://www.wic.org/misc/history.htm>, in an article excerpted from Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, one can read that "[w]omen constituted more than 45 percent of employed persons in the United States in 1989, but they had only a small share of the decision-making jobs. Although the number of women working as managers, officials, and other administrators has been increasing, in 1989 they were outnumbered about 1.5 to 1 by men". Also, Marie Cocco, from Washington Post Writers Group, in an article posted on December 30, 2008 at [http://www.alternet.org/reproductivejustice/115054/guess\\_which\\_corporate\\_suits\\_did\\_the\\_most\\_to\\_wreck\\_the\\_economy\\_men/](http://www.alternet.org/reproductivejustice/115054/guess_which_corporate_suits_did_the_most_to_wreck_the_economy_men/), about the 500 best American enterprises, writes that "Women held a 15.1 percent share of board director positions in Fortune 500 companies in 2008, [which] barely changed since 2005"; which implies that during the 1980s reality at such high levels of responsibility was even worse.

<sup>13</sup> At [www.wic.org/misc/history.html](http://www.wic.org/misc/history.html)

very constrained view of men's strategies to interrelate with the opposite sex, as well as those of women. Therefore, the whole dimension of friendship, of men and women enjoying each other's company socially is also missing in Mamet's drama. Although most of Mamet's plays reflect a fierce conflict, occasionally punctuated by moments of kinship, this kinship is almost always same-sex kinship. This offers once more an unbalanced view of the world, since there are not enough women in Mamet's plays for them to feel or show an equal propensity for bonding.

Mamet seems to be trapped between the espousal of a set of old-fashioned and sexist values and an awareness of the fact that they are old-fashioned and sexist and a desire to critique them. One can find in the five plays negative postures that are endorsed and negative postures that are decried. This shows Mamet's ambivalence and inconsistency; on the one hand he wants to show male pride and bonding, and seems to appreciate it and, on the other hand, he wants to expose and criticize that same attitude, which at heart he admits to be disingenuous in competitive contexts. This ambivalence most often leads to different or even violently oppositional readings of Mamet's work, which has helped to make him one of the most controversial playwrights of our times.

### **5.1. Language and Masculinity**

Although women have been striving to achieve their rightful place in society and worked their way towards sex equality successfully, at least legally, Deborah Tannen's research seems to prove that in spite of this, past prejudice concerning male and female social roles is still very much in evidence in today's society. Mamet himself, in his essay *True Stories of Bitches*, although trying to be ironic, seems to have present in his mind that men are stronger than women, and can ultimately resort to the use of their physical superiority to enforce their authority, to win a battle, and to show women who is in charge – which reminds us of *Oleanna*'s painful conclusion.

In husband-and-wife arguments, or, as they are generally known, 'marriage,' the ultimate response the man feels is, of course, physical violence. People can say what they will, we men think, but if I get pushed just one little step further, why I might, I might just \_\_\_\_\_(FILL IN THE BLANK) because she



seems to have forgotten that I'M STRONGER THAN HER (Mamet, 1994:140).

In her book *You Just Don't Understand*, Tannen claims that both men and women are heirs of a culture which places women at a disadvantage since their linguistic patterns and practices are socially interpreted as powerless and men's as powerful. Women are more likely than men to phrase their ideas as questions, take up less time with their questions and speak at a lower volume and higher pitch, which fits in with a pre-existing model of weak authority, and men tend to speak louder, longer and with more self-assertion, which commands more attention and respect. This is therefore viewed as a model of power, leadership and authority. When a woman displays an authoritative way of speaking she is thought to be revealing male characteristics and compromising her femininity; in the same way, when men reveal less authoritative ways of speaking, they are compromising their masculinity.

Since Mamet's plays are mainly inhabited by lower middle-class male figures, whose language register is strongly colloquial and imbued with expletives, the speech in his plays is essentially that of a masculinity on display. While trying to explain what defines Mamet's characters' language as masculine, Carla McDonough also argues that

Certainly the most obvious quality of language in Mamet's plays is the excessive use of expletives. (...) In addition to the expletives, these characters speak in rough, streetwise, and [an] extremely argumentative manner, no doubt influenced but not fully explained by the native speech of working-class Chicagoans. Each often seems to be using language to drown out other possible speakers and thus to dominate the stage space that he inhabits. (...) Mamet's characters also tend to use their speech to override any possible opposition (*ellipsis*, McDonough, 1997: 98).

Scott Kiesling, a prominent sociolinguist who has widely studied language and gender in the US context, particularly the study of "masculinities", defines masculinity as "social performances which are semiotically linked to men, and not to women, through cultural discourses and cultural models". He points out that men do not "plot" to dominate women, they are simply acting according to "a system of social practices" that often places them in a superior position to women. He defines four main cultural discourses of masculinity in most western cultures,

particularly in the USA: The “gender difference” discourse, which sees men and women as different in biology and behaviour; “heterosexism”, which sees masculinity in sexually desiring women and not men; the “dominance” discourse, which identifies masculinity with dominance, authority and power, in opposition to women’s discourse; and “male solidarity” discourse, which sees masculinity in wanting and needing to do things together with other men.

Concerning Kiesling’s first main cultural discourse of masculinity, that is “the gender difference”, one can listen to some male characters in Mamet’s plays making physical distinctive (and also reductive) characterisations of women in language content as well as behaviour. Thus, to Stan, in *Lakeboat*, women are “[s]oft things with a hole in the middle” (166), which by contrast alludes crudely to their usually less muscular build and different genital organs; and their tastes, knowledge and capacities differ from and contrast with those that are culturally assumed as belonging to the realm of the male figure. As Stan puts it:

Stan: What do they know of booze, the cunts?

Joe: Nothing.

Stan: They can’t drink. You ever know a woman who could drink?

Joe: Yeah.

Stan: What do they know?

Joe: A girl in Duluth.

Stan: They don’t understand it. It’s a man’s thing, drinking (*Mamet, 1987a: 140*).

However, Stan’s pretty overt misogyny is subtly opposed by Joe, whose intent is to mark his difference and to undermine Stan’s overgeneralising point about women. Yet, Stan is so absorbed and so sure that his interlocutor will agree with him that he doesn’t even hear or notice his disagreement. This is very revealing of some men’s behaviour when they are in an all male environment; they usually assume a community of interests and ideas that they don’t even bother to question. In the “gender difference discourse”, Joe comes across as an unbiased character and a subtle discordant voice of those who share an instrumental view of women and believe they are not to be taken seriously.

Women and their feminine characteristics are sometimes used by Mamet’s male characters, as previously noted, to express derogatory opinions about their interlocutors’ masculinity and express homophobia. In *Speed-The-Plow*, Fox

accuses Gould of “squat[ting] to pee” and of being an “old woman” as a means of insulting him and making him understand that he has lost his drive, that he has become weak. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Roma violently explodes at Williamson: “You stupid fucking cunt. You idiot. Whoever told you you could work with *men*?...You fairy. You company man...” (96), to mean either that he acts like a child, like a woman or like a gay - that is, with an insufficiency of virility necessary for work. And Roma also talks about “something *women* have”, like “prudence” and “thinking twice” when it concerns “a sizeable investment” (83), which are, in fact, very positive attitudes here wickedly presented by Roma (for the sake of his deal) as bad qualities to pass on the idea that Lingk’s wife is not able to make a decision like real men, like Lingk, who, as a man, and by Roma’s logic, is not supposed to be prudent or think twice - which sounds ridiculous and makes an idiot out of Lingk. In general, women are portrayed as displaying characteristics that men don’t possess, and those features are aligned with diffidence and hesitancy, marked as weakness.

As far as Kiesling’s “heterosexism” is concerned, one may say that it is always present in Mamet’s characters’ minds and discourse. In *Edmond*, male-female sexual intercourse is pointed out by the Mephistophelean man in the bar as one of the means to find release from the daily pressures of life, and not the male-male sexual intercourse, which Mamet offers instead as a kind of subversion. In the presence of a beautiful young woman, the temporary secretary, Fox’s male sexual instincts are awakened, which evidences his heterosexuality. These instincts are witnessed in the play when he observes, while addressing Gould: “You’re staying to put those moves on your new secretary” (*Mamet, 1988: 38*) and when he bets Gould “five hundred bucks” that he wouldn’t be able to “screw her” (38). In *Lakeboat*, sex and women are also often present in men’s discourse and the tall tales they tell, and, according to Fred, they are a major drawback to the profession and a constant concern of men on board: “the main thing about the boats, other than their primary importance in the Steel Industry, is that you don’t get pussy (...) This is important because it precludes your whole life on the boats. This is why everyone says ‘fuck’ all the time” (*ellipsis, Mamet, 1987a: 159*). So, life without sex is very dull as he adds: “They say ‘fuck’ in direct proportion to how

bored they are” (*Mamet, 1987a: 160*).

In Mamet’s plays, those who jeopardize their masculinity by not adopting the conventional heterosexual attitude to life find themselves cut off from society and the group and facing disempowerment. In *Edmond*, “faggots” are deeply disapproved of by Glenna, and Edmond himself, whose final seclusion and assumed homosexuality substantiates his social marginalization. Also, weaker male characters are usually addressed with contempt or dysphemisms of feminine nature. Williamson is blunt in his dislike of Levene, whom he addresses as Shelly, a name that is more commonly given to women than to men, when he explains the reason why he is going to tell the police and dismiss him: “Because I don’t like you” (104). Fox, on his side, reproaches a romantic Gould with vituperation like “You *wimp*, you *coward*”, or “You squat to pee. You old woman” (70), which confirms that a masculinist frame of mind takes being idealistic and worrying about people as a feminine, weak and unsuitable behaviour for a man. Kiesling’s “dominance” discourse category has already been analysed in the chapter about Language and Power, and “male solidarity” will be addressed further on, in The Nature of Male-Male Polarization sub-section.

Kiesling also enumerates the most prominent features of masculine language use, stating that men’s discursive strategies are those regarded as hierarchical and powerful. Men interrupt more than women, as a deliberate strategy to claim dominance, such as happens in *Oleanna*; they suppress their emotions in order to display power, although anger remains an important exception to this rule, which can also be witnessed in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, since those who reveal their personal concerns (Levene, Aaronow and Lingk) are taken as weak figures and those who display their anger and deploy aggressive verbal tactics (Moss and Roma) are viewed as powerful, or in *Speed-The-Plow*, as Gould becomes a weak figure by the time he starts showing a real concern about life and people whereas Fox remains strong and takes charge of the course of events by dismissing Gould’s moralistic worries and angrily fighting for his personal materialistic goals. Kiesling also claims that men use insults or boasting to build solidarity and to display “playful competitiveness”, and often threaten to use physical force to emphasize their holding of a position high up in the hierarchy.

The first tactic is clearly used by Fox in *Speed-The-Plow*. He insists on considering himself and Gould “bitches” and “whores”, words that he utters affectionately so as to convey a sense of “buddiness” and to praise their business capacities. This assumption is perceived as ironic, since they both blatantly praise business attitudes that are wrong as if they were right, and that really makes of them true “bitches” and “whores”. Fox also brags about the unimaginable things they will do with the money they will make out of the movie, rentals, tie-ins, and sequels. He hits Gould and threatens to kill him right there if he doesn’t give up on the “sissy” (70) film in favour of the “buddy” (24) movie, in a strategy to intimidate him and manoeuvre him into a submissive position. He resorts to the same strategy with Karen, when he threatens her: “You ever come on the lot again, I’m going to have you killed” (80). Men, argues Kiesling, also indulge in drinking games and betting, to create solidarity. Fox, in his cunning games to create complicity and a team spirit with his superior in rank, also bets Gould about getting laid (with Karen); and in *Lakeboat*, Stan and Joe brag about their drinking habits and knowledge on this very subject, Fred lets us know about his love for horseracing and the money he has lost in betting, Stan boasts about his sexual encounters and Fred likewise about his dominant position in a previous sexual relationship. Men in Mamet’s plays also reflect Kiesling’s findings that males do not place a great deal of value on politeness, since that may be viewed as a feminine social practice, and that instead they use working-class vernacular because its use denotes toughness and masculinity.

Kiesling also claims that men construct their heterosexuality and masculinity through stories about heterosexual sex, discussion of women and their looks. In *Lakeboat*, for example, Stan and Fred’s interchanges are often about women. In scene twelve, Stan brags: “Boy, did I get laid last night” (166), in scene six Fred asks: “Who was the most grotesque girl you ever fucked?” (150), and in scene ten he boasts about his early initiation into sexual life (160) and tells a tall tale about his brutal sexual relationship with a girl in high school.

At this point, it seems clear that men’s masculinity is measured by open contrast with perceived qualities of femininity in others, not necessarily with women themselves. The more feminine the qualities possessed or ascribed to a

man, the less social status he assumes or is given, the less feminine the qualities he displays or are attributed to him, the more powerful he assumes himself to be, or is perceived to be. Men's social performances and discursive strategies dictate their success within the group, their bids for power and hierarchical positioning.

## **5.2. The Male Figure(s)**

Apart from asserting themselves through antagonistic definitions of women, men in Mamet's plays compete for their masculine space and identity (respect, authority, and power) within the hierarchy of the group. They present themselves as more or less powerful, respectful and in authority, according to their capacity to conceal their personal lives and emotions. We know nothing about Fox's personal life, apart from the nature of his long-lasting relationship with Gould and his personal ambitions; therefore he is a strong character. His own name brings to mind the simile "as sly as a fox", which is a clue to his calculating personality. He has been supporting Gould for eleven years in the hope of using him as a lever to obtain success, power and wealth. For his part, Gould resembles double-pan scales: on one side is his materialistic ego, trying to succeed, to be in command and make money, on the other is his moralistic and idealistic self, assuming his wishes to be pure and "good" (43), and deciding to make a film about what people feel (54). However, the scale is often unbalanced, since strong external materialistic forces are tacitly operating on him. It is clear from the way the characters interrelate that Gould needs both Karen and Fox to feel balanced, a complete human being. However, they are incompatible and the stronger forces will superimpose themselves over the weaker. Fox supports him and bolsters his sense of power and authority, Karen constitutes his possibility for real love and freedom from fear of expressing his emotions. The denouement of the play and the fact that he can't keep both Karen and Fox as companions imply not only that materialistic goals tend to oust moralistic ideals, but also that the coexistence of these two human dimensions is unstable. Just by revealing his inner self and his moralistic side, Gould loses authority in the face of Fox. The latter gains power

over Gould and uses his new strength to manipulate him, “to get [him] to do something in [his] own best interest” (41). In *Edmond*, the protagonist can only gain authority and survive in the underworld by adopting the crafty ways of its inhabitants and therefore when he stops speaking his mind. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, where a tough competition is set up and there’s only place for one winner, it seems that the less you reveal about yourself and your feelings, the bigger your chance to succeed and be respected is, and therefore the less chance there is to be taken advantage of or to become victim of debilitating contempt. Signs of weakness are immediately latched onto by the other salesmen to show their disregard, to swindle, gain advantage, claim their own superiority and boost their own self-confidence, as proved in Moss and Aaronow’s conversation during the First Act. Here, Aaronow reveals his guileless nature and moral concern toward customers, when he states that their competitive business is “not right to the customers” (31), which opens the space for Moss’s attempted confidence game. The characters in this play evidence a kind of tribal behaviour; everybody knows everybody else’s exact place in the structure, but they are always challenging each other. In a tribe, as in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, contempt is a debilitating thing; if somebody within the group is victim of contempt, he cannot hold his position or status in the group. In *Oleanna*, as I have stated on page 74, John’s personal confessions and revelations expose his flank and lead to his disempowerment.

In an often highly competitive world, like that of *Speed-The-Plow*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Edmond*, and *Oleanna*, men rely solely on themselves and must keep focused on business or alert in order to succeed or survive. Therefore, powerful men are portrayed as entities with no past or life outside the stage-bound narrative. Those who make the mistake of uncovering their feelings or their personal lives end up losing their power, or authority. Although they may sometimes reveal some spirit of team-work, as is the case of Levene and Roma or Fox and Gould, their underlying purposes are always selfish. They are solitary, even lonely characters, since they have no one to confide in or turn to for disinterested support. And because “a man’s his job” (*Mamet*, 1984: 75) and no one wants to be “fucked” at his job (75), the inner dimension of the self must remain concealed in order to preserve one’s status as a male and to survive at

work. This is a heavy burden that men have to carry in silence in the business sphere. It implies that, to put it mildly, the work environment is impregnated with hypocrisy so that men must live artificial lives to survive.

In *Lakeboat*, since the seamen are not in a particularly competitive world, and their rank in the hierarchy of the boat doesn't seem to depend on their success over their peers, they don't need to hide their lives or feelings. On the contrary, as a group alienated from the world outside the boat, and therefore deprived of regular and varied social relationships, they tend to create bonds amongst themselves by telling stories about their or other peoples' personal lives, or by talking about their masculine deeds or the subjects they are interested in. They long to confide and establish emotional connections, as Joe so clearly does with Dale, although they also tend to exaggerate in order to capture their interlocutor's attention and enthusiasm, or gain his admiration, as in the "No Pussy" interchange between Fred and Dale. Despite their emotional need and clear intentions to create bonds, their conversations and postures are imbued with demotic vigour and virility, which they display to prove that they share the same attitudes and interests, that they belong to the same community, and that their identities are mutually endorsed.

### **5.3. The Female Figure(s)**

Despite their frequent physical absence from Mamet's plays, women are always acknowledged because of the necessity men have to mark their space and define their identity through the establishment of a contrast with the opposite sex. Lingk's absent but apparently over-dominating wife in *Glengarry Glen Ross* is a clear case in point. Roma feels the need to belittle her and to distance men's behaviour from hers, since she holds power enough to intrude and stand up against the salesmen's deceiving way of making business. Therefore, the woman is a crucial and indispensable element in the definition of masculinity in Mamet's plays. When physically assuming a role in the plays, women are usually outnumbered by men and occupy a minor or secondary role, but which can still



assume a varied presence. Women are usually opposed and defined by men in accordance with the threat they represent by invasion of the masculine space and/or by the breaking of the different males' established bonds.

The physical presence and relevance of women is most obvious in *Oleanna* and in *Speed-The-Plow*. Although Carol has already been the object of a thorough analysis in the sub-section about Language and Transformation of Character, one might reiterate here that the interpretation one makes of her is achieved through her sly action and sudden inexplicable capacity to subjugate John (the masculine), assuming intellectual capacities apparently lacking until then. Despite revealing herself naïve and uneducated at first, and consequently misjudged by John and the audience, who see her as a weak character unable to challenge masculine privilege, she suddenly appears as a strong feminine element drawing upon subtly acquired knowledge, proving her reasoning abilities and destroying every possible assumption thus far created about her character. Deprived of the necessary prior information to assess Carol's personality, the audience is liable to interpret her as a calculating entity prepared to do anything to get on in life. At first, as an underprivileged student, Carol had seemed to be an ingénue only capable of grasping the idea that prevailed in eighties America that higher education was uniquely a passport to success.

In *Speed-The-Plow*, Karen is equally initially taken as naïve and not the type to use other people to climb the social ladder. As a temporary secretary she also occupies a lower position in the social hierarchy than that occupied by the other two male characters. Therefore, she, too, is assumed to be an inoffensive woman, not prone to invade or pose a threat to the masculine space or bonds, as perceived and stated by Fox (35). Nevertheless, Karen feels tempted by the power Gould could confer on her and admits her wickedness and depravity, having acted naïve by pretending not to understand Gould's real intentions right from the start (58). Karen apparently reveals herself as a rounded human being with intrinsic virtues and flaws. Just as Carol does briefly, Karen admits to being bad (58); however, she makes sure to justify her judgment, to allow the audience to understand her reasons, instead of hiding them as Carol does. The public recognition and admission of her faults help reconstruct her character as weak but

truthful, which morally plays in her favour. The same occurs when she is sharply confronted by Fox, and she lets out the comments: "I think I'm being punished for my wickedness" and "I don't belong here" (80). In admitting this she may be denying two things: her capacity for confrontation and her willingness to accept and take part in a business she finds unfair, degrading to the human spirit and pointless (55), since it is not meant to do good or to meet people's real needs. The feminine in *Speed-The-Plow* clearly occupies the morally developed side of the human being, and the masculine the materialistic side. Those two opposing forces can't easily coexist; when the moralistic side (feminine) invades the masculine space, stronger materialistic forces (Fox) round on it. In *Oleanna*, Carol is also sometimes close to confession, although she never gets so far as external forces (the telephone) interrupt those crucial moments. As in *Speed-The-Plow*, the woman is the one who broaches moral themes which are in conflict with current practices. Although both women apparently wish to change the state of affairs, neither of them can be separated from their material circumstances and from self-interest; they allow themselves to be affected by the typically masculine craving for power and success. As Fox puts it

Everyone wants power. How do we get it? Work. How do they get it? Sex.  
The end. She's different? Nobody's different. *You* aren't, *I'm* not, why should she? The broad wants power (71).

These two women prove to be more susceptible to masculine priorities than having the strength to impose feminine values on the masculine space. In this sense they are both weaker characters than men. In spite of their attempts to resist the male element and impose themselves, these two figures, as well as Glenna in *Edmond*, end up defeated; Karen verbally and Carol and Glenna physically. However, this subjugation of women through brutal force also reveals that essentially the basis of the so-called male superiority and male privilege is no more than their brute strength, and at the end of the day that shows that men hold their position over women by brutal force and not by rightness. That is why some might choose to read it as a success that they have provoked their male adversaries into acts of savage violence. If so, it seems a hollow victory, and one which too many women even today experience.

In *Lakeboat*, women are only present in the sailors' conversations; hence, their profile is only visible from a biased male point of view. To the seamen, women are directly associated with sex, and therefore often referred to as "pussy" (159) or "cunt" (140, 163, 174). From the men's conversations one can conclude that women, although portrayed as weak figures, sexual objects and a source of trouble, are an obsessive topic in the masculine mind and are indispensable for their psychological balance. Thus, although objectified, women end up somewhat exalted by the pain and desire their absence inflicts. The seamen's attitude towards women can be explained by their fear of emasculation, which is recurrent in Mamet's male characters. As a male community in which everyone is expected to act according to pre-established traditional norms of behaviour towards women, any less vigorous treatment of them might weaken a man and endanger his position within the group. That's why Joe, despite disagreeing with Stan in the excerpt cited on page 109, doesn't enforce his opposing idea about women, and that's also why one can only see him melancholically confiding with Dale, the most liberalist and ingénue character aboard, about his past wishes of becoming a ballet dancer, or about the phallic episode of his attempted suicide with a revolver he had bought in Duluth (207, 208), but always being careful to fully justify himself, for fear of sounding too emasculated:

Joe: (...) I wanted to be a dancer. Not tap, I mean a real ballet dancer. I know they're all fags, but I didn't think about it. I didn't *not* think about it. That is, I didn't say, 'I want to be a dancer but I do *not* want to be a fag.' It just wasn't important (*ellipsis*: 205, 206).

In *Edmond*, clearly a more exploratory, non-naturalistic and unsettling play than the others under review here, fragile male identity can only be shored up through the possession, exertion of power and dominance over the feminine. Thus, in the words of the man in the bar, Edmond's masculinity will only be reestablished through heterosexual intercourse

Edmond: ... I feel...  
 Man: I know. Like your balls were cut off.  
 Edmond: Yes. A long, long time ago.  
 Man: Mm-hm.  
 Edmond: And I don't feel like a man.  
 Man: Do you know what you need?

Edmond: No.

Man: You need to get laid (228).

However, this attempt to reestablish his masculinity is consecutively thwarted. Women in *Edmond* are astute, fundamental characters that transact with men and permit their self-assertion as masculine only for a price. They have no names; they are abstract entities that embody that feminine function. The woman in the subway has no name either; she also personifies an abstract feminine entity that offers opposition as much as the repletion Edmond tries to establish. It seems that the reestablishment of Edmond's identity is doomed. Glenna, whose exotic name curiously suggests the other gender, is the only woman in the play that has a name. She is representative of the city's lower middle-class emancipated young women of the 1980s, with a precarious job, living on her own and getting involved in casual sex. Edmond believes he has found in her his chance to exert his masculine hegemony and recover his male self again. However, that possibility is once again denied him, as Glenna turns into an opposing force that refuses to accept Edmond's dominance over her by rejecting a messianic and essentialist reality that he attempts to impose on her. Glenna is a waitress who aspires to a career as an actress but in the face of Edmond's insistence that she assume her real identity (as he thinks he is doing), she collapses. The refusal to carry out a command uttered by Edmond generates a conflict that reveals the underlying presence of two opposing forces; they both refuse to submit, to see their own sought identities challenged and fantasies denied. Consequently, in the face of impasse, the inevitable tragedy occurs: as a physically superior entity, Edmond plays his last card by resorting to physical aggression. Thus, Edmond also undercuts Glenna's initially boosted self-confidence and evasion into a happy flourishing dream life which may be viewed as the echo of the ideal successful life to which everyone may aspire, as embodied by the myth of the American Dream. Women, instead of reinforcing masculinity, as expected, seem to carry the threat of obstruction that denies Edmond the hope of reestablishing his identity as a man. Women are strong and determined characters who won't allow Edmond to subdue them or erase the independent identity they have achieved within their feminine space. Like Carol and Glenna, who invoke their peers for support, the nameless

feminine entities in the plays also seem to rely on a close-knit community of female mates.

As in *Lakeboat*, in *Glengarry Glen Ross* women are physically absent. Most men don't even mention them, except when they need to distance themselves from femininity in order to define their own masculinity. They are depicted for the most part by the salesmen as weak, inefficient hindrances, not cut out for business. Levene and Lingk are the only male characters that reveal a direct relationship with the feminine and, therefore, when they demonstrate concern or respect for them, they project a pathetic image of themselves. Levene's daughter is sick and weak, Lingk's wife is strong, determined, authoritative and well-informed – a threat to the all-male deal-making, the mere invocation of whom is enough to draw out of Roma all his psychological tricks and manipulations.

Although women prove to have the same aspirations as men, they generally lack their inner drive, their strength and ruthlessness. They tend to give up easily in the face of obstacles and can't endure long confrontations, particularly Karen and Glenna. When supported by their group they gain confidence and become stronger. However, in the face of the male physical menace Mamet's female characters muster, they retract, as physically inferior figures.

In the 1980s and early 1990s women were still trying to consolidate the gains of the 1960s and 1970s, in terms of their own independent intellectual, social and economic identities. Mainly in the economic arena, which became more feral after Reaganomics came into play, they were source of anxiety as they were perceived by men to be potential threats that could challenge the instruments of control that they had hitherto wielded over them, particularly through their enhanced economic earning power. As Mamet's plays are mainly set in the world of work and constitute a heightened reenactment of the harsh ethos of the times, the feminine invasion of perceived male territory meets often with excessive resistance. Thus, women, when not scarce or objectified as sexual commodities, are often portrayed as ripe for crushing, often as in *Edmond*, in a very over-determined way. To misquote *Hamlet*, the Gentleman doth protest too much!

#### 5.4. The Nature of the Male-Female Polarization

In Mamet's plays, men define themselves and their peers by contrast with the opposite sex; in a fairly crude way, being a male is all that is opposite to being a female. To possess feminine qualities is to be weak, sensitive, dim and unable to "work with *men*" (Mamet, 1984: 96). By contrast, to possess masculine qualities is to be virile, strong, courageous, and tough. Although women are generally constructed as weak entities whom men exert power over and whom they usually hold responsible for all their difficulties or identity crises, paradoxically, and ironically, they are also essential to attest to their manliness, their virility. To "feel like a man", Edmond seeks sexual intercourse with women. In this crazy postulate presented to him in the bar, the exertion of domination over women in the sexual act confers on men the sense of virility they need to feel self-confident and proud of themselves, like Fred in *Lakeboat*. Therefore, women are faced by some of Mamet's male characters as a kind of trial. By any reckoning many fail the test.

As contrasting figures and opposing forces, men and women are generally in conflict in Mamet's plays. In *Speed-The-Plow*, women are presented as candid, as long as they show no interference or constitute no menace to male bonding. Thus, Fox admits that Karen will be easily lured into going to bed with Gould, and he clearly presents her as inoffensive when he expresses his first impressions about her by saying: "I don't think she is so ambitious she would schtup you just to get ahead", and that she isn't "a floozy" (35). However, as soon as she is perceived as a menace to his relationship with Gould, she becomes "the broad" who "wants power" (71), "[a] Tight Pussy wrapped around ambition" who was "fucked on a bet" (78) and whom he is going to have killed if she ever comes "on the lot again" (80). Ling's wife, in *Glengarry Glenn Ross*, and Carol, in *Oleanna*, are portrayed as strong characters, aware, well-informed, determined and also capable of dominating the male figure. They constitute a distant echo of Abigail Adams or Susan B. Anthony in the defense of their rights, or of what they believe to be their rights, as they seek for legal support and tenaciously fight to achieve their goals. Carol believes she deserves a passing grade and the same chance as John to "get on in life", and is resolute in getting rid of the professor and his

prescribed book. Lingk's wife's resolve to cancel the contract and the power she has over her husband are also revealed, although through Lingk's words, where there is considerable ambiguity about whose money it is:

Lingk: She wants her money back (...) right now. (...)

Roma: No, no. That's just something she 'said.' We don't have to do that.

Lingk: She told me I *have* to.

Roma: No, Jim.

Lingk: I *do*. If I don't get my *money* back... (*ellipsis*, Mamet, 1984: 90, 91)

And further on:

Lingk: I can't negotiate.

Roma: What does that mean? (...)

Lingk: I don't have the power. I said it (*ellipsis*, Mamet, 1984: 91, 92).

In *Edmond*, women also constitute antagonistic forces. Although indirectly, they frustrate Edmond's intent, which is to recover his lost masculinity. In *Lakeboat*, women's antagonism is a result of the seamen's circumstances; where they tend to have an enforced celibate's instrumental view of women which is dangerously distorting. Although men recognize that they cannot live without the opposite sex, or at least without the sexual gratification they provide, the workplace they inhabit is deserted of women. Therefore, their simple absence constitutes their antagonism. Although there is no direct conflict in the play between male and female figures, sometimes it can be glimpsed in the seamen's demeaning language and conversations about women, which are thick with hostile sexual allusions. Thus, Guigliani, the missing night cook, is said to have been mugged by "this slut", or a "bitch" (129, 130), and Fred, while talking about the alimony he pays his ex-wife complains that he "was doing extra deck- work and running to the track so that woman could fuck off and pamper the kids" (174).

## 5.5. The Nature of the Male-Male Polarization

Although much has already been said about how male characters interrelate, one can conclude that they are primarily antagonists with women, from the many undignified references to them or favourable contrasts established with that

gender. Only after this are their male peers recognized as antagonists. Because theirs is undoubtedly a man's world from the way it is selectively portrayed, men seem to generally feel a lot more comfortable in the company of other men than in the company of women, whom they seek out for mating but not for business purposes or any other sort of entertainment or socialization. The lack of stress Mamet places on men's social relations with women is surely significant; it is a rich field of observation and one towards which he shows no interest.

Mamet's essay *In the Company of Men*, brings us back to Kiesling's "male solidarity discourse". According to Mamet, men get together for three different purposes: to do business, to have fun together, and to bitch - which he explains as the activity of complaining about women and "piss and moan, and take comfort in the fact that our fellows will, at some point, reveal that, yes, *they* are weaklings, too, and there's no shame in it" (Mamet, 1994: 280). Accordingly, as constructs of a male world, most Mamet's plays revolve around men's interrelationships in the world of business. Although these male congregations pursue the same goal – to do business, to make money – and look for contact and support in the world they inhabit, the fierce competitive nature of business forces them to be opponents and act individually. Competition and antagonism are an inherent part of these characters' life and underlie their relationships. And even though one may find the figures of the mentor and the protégé, in the figures of Levene and Gould and Roma and Fox, respectively, the underlying emphasis is always individualistic and self-centered, which means that to succeed they will not hesitate to swindle each other.

Despite the prevalent competitive business relationships established in Mamet's plays, in *Lakeboat* one can also observe men gathering "to bitch", particularly in the interchange between Fred and Joe, in *The Cook Story* scene, and to have fun together, which, in Mamet's view, consists in "spending time with the boys" (Mamet, 1994: 281) talking about or engaging in typical male activities, enjoying male companionship "in an environment where one is understood, where one is not judged" (281) and where "you will be greeted on the basis of your actions: no one will enquire into your sincerity, your history, or your views, if you do not choose to share them" (282). It is a "*communal* activity" that generates a



feeling of peace which men can't find in the presence of women (282).

Although Mamet's arguable misogyny is not the centre of my interest and analysis in this dissertation, I would like to state *en passant* that as a playwright who uses his personal experience to portray the contemporary American context on stage and to give the audience a chance for self-acknowledgement and change, I believe Mamet is just being reflective of the social reality he was acquainted with, and of which he was also to some extent a part. He is just reenacting episodes of life that he has witnessed in his own American social context. It is also to be noted that in his plays there is always a man who cares for and respects women, or women who have their moments of empowerment – which is also revealing of a hope for change in the prevailing social gender disparity. Levene cares for his daughter, Joe admires a woman in Duluth, Glenna doesn't submit, Karen almost gets to persuade Gould, Carol succeeds in achieving empowerment and erodes John's sense of privilege, Mrs Link seems to wear the trousers in the house and, in the whores' admittedly torrid world, they remain self-confident and determined in their roles. Despite male characters' sometimes blatant misogynistic and homophobic observations, Mamet also opens doors in his plays to reveal a changing society in which women are beginning to gain power and occupy visible positions. It appears that his characters' use of misogynistic remarks, as well as homophobic ones, works as a shield to protect themselves from some of the new social forces that were then emerging and that were menacing traditional male hegemony. There is often a fearful reaction, as if words could hold back the tide from happening.

## **Conclusion**

As a playwright who was born into a disruptive family, David Mamet left home as soon as life allowed him to. He was forced to fend for himself in life, which may have contributed to his self-proclaimed auto-didacticism. As a very observant, insightful and critical individual, his early dilettante social and professional life provided him with an experience that, together with his Jewish family education allowed him to become a unique playwright. He fell in with the theatre milieu, had a particular liking for the use of strong language and had had, prior to this, experience of the blue-collar world. Although he has been compared to many other playwrights, he has stood alone in his uniqueness at reenacting language, power and gender confrontations onstage.

Mamet's widely stated belief that a good play must contain only the essential to fully carry out its objective, has made him write and stage minimalist plays, devoid of unessential props, directions, characters or language - hence the objective vocabulary of his highly dialogical plays. Despite this formal minimalism, his plays are imbued with subjectivity. Lack of information, innuendo generated through unfinished sentences and ideas, intentional or unintentional interruptions of characters' utterances, and prosodic devices, such as rhythm, pace or inflection, which set the tone of the plays, are textual techniques that contribute to generate that prison of subjectivity. Thus, characters often seem unable to fully communicate, since they appear to misinterpret each others' words, miss the intentions that underlie their interlocutor's words, or find it impossible to fully express themselves.

Mamet's particular use of demotic language is another characteristic that distinguishes him from other playwrights. The blue-collar world Mamet has known so well is, in a capitalistic society, intrinsically a world of fierce competition and deception, a world of scam and hypocrisy. To depict this mainly masculine working class environment, Mamet resorts to the aggressive sort of language that characterises it; that is, unreserved profanity, invective and jargon. This apparent attempt to reconstruct a certain linguistic ambiance is, however, denied by the

sonorities Mamet generates in the dialogues he builds. The frequent deliverance of short and abrupt lines, the generation of rhyme and syncopated rhythms, and the ungrammatical sentences produced, all contribute to confer on Mamet's dialogues the sonorities mainly found in poetry. This alliance of demotic language and poetic sonorities in his plays has gained him the title of "the poet of the streets", and the resulting linguistic style has been coined as "Mametspeak".

Mamet reveals his characters' personalities through language. These are most often static, as characters' behaviour evidences no significant change or surprise throughout the plays. However, this is not the case with Carol, in *Oleanna*, or Edmond, in *Edmond*, whose language or even physical reactions are aggravated in the face of frustrating or conflicting situations, which generate a surprising (since unexpected) reaction in the audience. Although Carol's shifting behaviour might be explained as resulting from external influential forces (her group or her legal representative), her sudden and apparently unexplainable oratory skills have left many wondering whether she had been feigning all along. Edmond's growing dementia seems to result from his psychological inability to cope with a brutal external world.

Mamet's preference for reconstructing verbal interchanges amongst characters that inhabit particular areas of business and for picturing the way they interrelate is telling for his views on American business policies and their emergent cultural ethos. Mamet omits in his plays to denounce that which he believes to be wrong in order to expose indirectly the evils of the society the audience is also a part of. Instead of placing his characters in a collaborative and honest quest to provide the audience with a good positive example, he confronts the latter with the bleak reality of the competitive, greedy and fraudulent world that surrounds them and which is often the result of external superior forces characters cannot control – the coercing policies and utopian promises of success. To survive in this highly competitive world, Mamet's characters must have recourse to all sorts of tools that confer power on them over their interlocutors, be they linguistic skills, age, hierarchical position, education, money, power of decision, gender, race, or professional status. This competition amongst members of the same team triggers hypocrisy and self-centeredness, which gives way to a debased sense of

buddyship, as possible collaborators become covert adversaries. Characters resort to all sorts of stratagems to supersede their workmates, con their clients, or best potential opponents, in order to attain power, success and ultimately money. In their permanent need to look strong, self-confident and able, they must hide their inner feelings and personal lives; hence Mamet's circumscribed portrayal of his characters. The recourse to invective and profanity - which often results in misogynistic or homophobic diatribe - also constitutes a verbal and psychological strategy to intimidate and regain power when menaced. Women are most often portrayed by the male characters as weak and unreliable; therefore, when one attributes to a man the qualities of a woman, he is not only offending the interlocutor by denigrating his performance, he is also denying, by contrast, the possession of such qualities and thus outdoing his oppositor. This constitutes not only an act of aggression, but also works as a self-confidence booster.

American men are usually depicted as strong and fierce power-seekers. Although success (money) is their ultimate goal, ironically failure is often all they get in the end. This distressingly systematic result is clearly the symptom of an ineffective set of rules and principles, themselves deceitful, that have been previously interiorized and that have become part of the social *modus vivendi* that has, as a consequence, isolated individuals in duplicitous worlds.

In the environment and interrelationships they establish both males and females are nevertheless unable to restrain themselves from revealing their self-interest. In the world of struggle the plays reconstruct men act individually – even when in an inferior position – whereas women, although always departing from an inferior position, I would argue, seek the support of other women to face their oppositors. Apart from women's putative incapacity to survive isolated from the group in a male aggressive world, male characters also look down on them, which is evident in the deprecating analogies they establish in their dialogues. Thus, women are depicted by male characters as disempowered, weak, losers, unreliable, and totally unfit for the harsh world of business competition. From the disinterested point of view of the audience, women become more difficult to interpret than men. Whereas men are blatant as to their intentions, concealing this only from their workmates, but never from the audience, women, on the contrary,

seem to be less clear in their motivation, leaving the impression that something was left unsaid or hidden, that there might be (or might not be) some machinations in their action/words, particularly in Carol's and Karen's case. As sometimes the whole truth seems to be left unrevealed, some feminine characters are prone to be viewed either as innocent victims or as schemers.

Despite creating human beings who, regardless of their sex, are fearful and vulnerable by nature, in the masculine world Mamet reconstructs men must permanently prove their masculinity or risk contempt or humiliation. To display their vigor and fearlessness they resort to linguistic strategies such as coarse and aggressive language and utterly argumentative discourse. They also brag about their heterosexual deeds or business achievements. Theirs is an all-male and tough world, where women seemingly have no place. The different genders don't seem to socialize much in the business environment on display, which also helps to explain men's limited knowledge and understanding of women. Mamet's male duets propitiate the impression of a kind of intimacy and a (false) sense of bonding different from that generated by his not so common male and female duets, in which the physical presence of the opposite sex seems to produce some kind of discomfort – maybe as a result of characters' heterosexuality or of the ignorance of the ways of the interlocutor - as a result of their scarce contact.

Although Mamet depicts a world full of greed and empty of moral principles, in which both men and women's behaviours are highly reprehensible, one can find in some of the characters, namely in Karen, Gould or Aaronow, moments of moral awareness and concern, which settle our own fears in the face of a society whose values appeared to have been irremediably lost.

The omission from Mamet's plays of a true communitarian life based on honesty, trust, and equal treatment, in which the individual is not afraid of being judged for his weaknesses and feels free to express himself/herself openly, without concealments, and to demonstrate communal values, mirrors Mamet's socio-political concerns about the American ethos. Mamet presents an exaggerated cultural reality, which some critics have found comic, to reveal its flaws and ironies: the desire for success and its unattainableness; the need for trust and real bonding but, at the same time, its impossibility.

Although I am certain that there has been a lot left unsaid about these five plays, I've done my best to address succinctly the most relevant issues that David Mamet's plays seem to raise. Had I more time or space, I would have also addressed other intriguing issues in the plays, namely the mark of Mamet's Jewishness in his plays or the role of absent characters. It would also be interesting to analyse Mamet's evolution as a playwright by comparing the structure and content of his earlier and later plays, or his apparently seamless movement into cinema, or even into television, which from the example provided by *The Unit* series would perhaps lead us to believe that he is, after all, a devotee of all-male bonding contexts, and that women there are somewhat stereotypical and much less interesting than those in his plays.

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## **Filmography:**

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*American Buffalo*. Dir. Michael Corrente. MGM/UA Studios, 1996.

*Lakeboat*. Dir. Joe Mantegna. MTI Home Video, 2002.

*Edmond*. Dir. Stuart Gordon. Muse Production and Tartan Films, 2005.

## **Appendix**

### **Mamet's Plays:**

#### **A Chronological List, with their Premières**

*Lakeboat* (1970) - First version of the play staged at the Theatre Workshop, Marlboro College, Marlboro, Vermont, in 1970.

*Duck Variations* (1972) – Goddard College in 1972. The Off-Off Broadway production opened at the Theatre of St. Clement's, New York City during December 1975. On June 16th 1976 it was transferred to Off Broadway, Cherry Lane Theatre, New York City, and closed on April 27<sup>th</sup> 1977, for 273 performances.

*Litko* (1972) – Body Politic Theatre, Chicago, 1972.

*Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974) – Leo Lerner Theatre, Organic Theatre Company, Chicago, June, 1974. The Off-Off Broadway opened at St. Clement's Theatre, New York, on September 29, 1975 for 12 performances. Moved to Off Broadway to the Cherry Lane Theatre, New York City on June 16, 1976 and closed April 17, 1977, for 273 performances.

*Squirrels* (1974) - St. Nicholas Theatre Company, the Leo A. Lerner Theatre, Chicago. October 10, 1974.

*Mackinac* (1974) – Chicago, November, 1974.

*American Buffalo* (1975) – Ruth Page Auditorium, Goodman Theatre, Chicago. October 23, 1975.

*The Poet and the Rent* (1975) - St. Nicholas Theatre Company at Jane Addams Theatre of Hull House. June 19, 1975.

*Marranos* (1975) – Bernard Horwich Jewish Community, Chicago, November, 1975.

*Reunion* (1976) - St. Nicholas Theatre Company, Chicago, January 9, 1976.

*A Life in the Theatre* (1977). Goodman Theatre, Chicago. February 3, 1977.

*The Water Engine, An American Fable* (1977) – St. Nicholas Theatre Company, Chicago. May 11 through June 19, 1977.

*Revenge of the Space Pandas, or Binky Rudich and the Two-Speed Clock* (1977) -

Theatre of St. Clement's, New York City. June 11, 1977.

*Dark Pony* (1977) – Yale Repertory production, New Haven, CT, October 14, 1977.

*The Woods* (1977) - St. Nicholas Theatre Company, Chicago. November 17 to December 18, 1977.

*Mr. Happiness* (1978) – Plymouth Theatre, New York City, March, 1978.

*Sanctity of Marriage* (1979) – Circle in the Square, New York, October 18, 1979.

*The Blue Hour: City Sketches* (1979) – The Public Theatre, February, 1979.

*Lone Canoe, or the Explorer* (1979) – Goodman Theatre, Chicago. May 24, 1979.

*Lakeboat* (1980) - Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Court Street Theatre, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 24, 1980.

*Edmond* (1982) – Goodman Theatre, Chicago. June 4, 1982. Moved to Provincetown Playhouse, New York City on October 20 and closed January 2, 1983 for 77 performances.

*The Disappearance of the Jews* (1983) – Goodman Theatre Studio. June 3 to July 3, 1983.

*Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983) – Cottesloe in the National Theatre, London, September 21, 1983. Goodman Theatre Studio, Chicago, on February 6, and played through March 4, 1984. Moved to the John Golden Theatre, New York City; opened on March 25, 1984, and closed on February 17, 1985, for 378 performances.

*The Frog Prince* (1984) – Louisville, April, 1984.

*The Cherry Orchard* (1985) - Chicago, March, 1985.

*The Spanish Prisoner* (1985) - New Theatre Group at the Briar Street Theater, Chicago. April 19, 1985.

*The Shawl* (1985) – New Theatre Group at the Briar Street Theater, Chicago. April 19, 1985.

*Prairie du Chien* (1985) – Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater at Lincoln Centre, New York. Opened December 24, 1985 and closed February 2, 1986.

*Speed-the-Plow* (1988) – Lincoln Center Theater at the Royale Theater, New York. Previewed on April 9, for 24 performances and opened May 2, running until December 31, 1988 for 278 more performances.

*Bobby Gould In Hell* (1989) – Under the title *Oh, Hell* at the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre, Lincoln Centre, New York City. November 7 to December 31, 1989, with 32 previews and 32 performances.

*Oleanna* (1992) – Back Bay Theatre Company in association with American Repertory Theater at the Hasting Pudding Theatre, Cambridge, Massachusetts. May 1, 1992. Back Bay Theatre Company moved to the Orpheum Theatre in New York City. The production ran from October 26, 1992, until January 16, 1994, for 513 performances.

*The Cryptogram* (1994) – Ambassadors Theatre, West End, London. June 29, 1994. C. Walsh Theatre, Boston, and the West Theatre Upstairs, New York, 1995.

*An Interview* (part of *Death Defying Acts*) (1995) – Variety Arts Theatre, New York on March 6, 1995.

*No One Will be Immune* (1995) – Marathon '95, Ensemble Studio Theater, New York, May 3 to June 11.

*The Old Neighborhood* (1997) – American Repertory Theatre, at the Hasting Pudding Theatre, Cambridge, Massachusetts. April 11 to May 4, 1997.

*The Jade Mountain* (1998) – 21<sup>st</sup> annual Ensemble Studio Theater's festival of one-acts, Marathon '98. June 1998.

*Boston Marriage* (1999) – American Repertory Theatre at the Hasty Pudding Theatre, Cambridge Massachusetts. June 4 to June 27, 1999.

*Faustus* (2004) – The Magic Theatre, San Francisco. February 24 to April 18, 2004.

*Romance* (2005) – Atlantic Theatre Company, New York, 2005.

*November* (2008) – Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York City. January 17 to July 13, 2007.

*Keep Your Pantheon* (2009) – Atlantic Theatre Company, New York. September 30, 2009.

*School* (2009) – Atlantic Theatre Company, New York. September 30, 2009.

*Race* (2009) - Ethel Barrymore Theatre. New York City, December 6, 2009.